THE LOG OF THE "EASY WAY"

JOHN L. MATHEWS

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THE
LOG OF THE EASY WAY

NEWTON, MASS.

The Open Road — An unusually busy day

The Log of the Easy Way

BY

JOHN L. MATHEWS

AUTHOR OF "THE CONSERVATION OF WATER," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

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PREFACE

WHERE we can lay our hands upon it in a moment when the whim comes upon us, is the original Log of the *Easy Way*, an envelope full of loose sheets of paper, at least a page for every day of the seven months of drifting, the events of the day, the place we moored, the miles we travelled — the data which are necessary for ordering the main events.

Best of all in these loose pages there are other notes, set down from day to day, that ndicate the more vital things, the thoughts that came to us, the indications, that only we ourselves can discover and delight in, of the creation of new points of view, new habits, new knowledge as we went through sunlight and storm, through happy days and sad days together. And with it the spirit of vagabondage, the loosening of the bonds which grip the mind the hard routine and the enforced conventions of city life gradually yielding and permitting the mentally footloose condition of the true philosophical vagabond. We did not reach this condition then, for it is one of evolution and growth; but those early stages when we were learning to know men and women as they were

to meet them in their own paths, and were no longer foot-bound in our own — they are recorded in this beloved Log.

The torn and tattered pages of our chart share the same envelope with them — bound sheets of detail maps which guided us down the river. On every leaf they are annotated for every day, sometimes notes similar to those in the Log, but more commonly little incidents, strange meetings, accidents, specific items of other shanty-boat folks, delights we thought of along the way, set down at the mile post at which they belong.

These two things, the tattered chart and the Log, constitute our only tangible records of the *Easy Way*; they strengthen and refresh our memories. Yet there are many memories which can never fade, so avid were our new lives for the impressions we were receiving, so nascent to the experiences the Great Water developed for us.

As we grew together then, and worked together upon the *Easy Way*, so we have grown together and worked together in this story from its Log. Though it bears my name upon the titlepage, that is because I was elected narrator. It is a work of equal partnership, built out of the memories of aches and troubles, of struggle and toil, no less than out of leisurely drifting,

of days of fine pleasure, of awakening experiences which make us cherish as a thing deep in ourselves this record of our first journey together.

JOHN L. MATHEWS.

MAY 24, 1911.

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THE
LOG OF THE EASY WAY

THE
LOG OF THE EASY WAY

CHAPTER I

THE EASY WAY

It was on the first day of September, 1900, that, hunting in every crack and cranny in which a boat-builder might be supposed to lurk, or whence by purchase or stealth I might hope to secure a floating home, I discovered Mac, an ancient mariner, moored with his long-suffering family in a house boat of his own construction, to the river bank in the desolate region beyond the Santa Fe elevator. In a dilapidated chicken-coop amid the sweet clovers which still lingered in hopeless opposition to the murky stream beside them, a distracted hen clucked for a lot of tiny ducklings, essaying their first adventure upon this "bubbling brook." From the open end of a half barrel a mongrel pup barked viciously at me. An unstable gang plank, over which the pup

stood guard, led across a couple of feet of mud and water to the overhanging deck of the *Annie Mac.*

In my roseate vision, at the moment, Mac, whom a halloo summoned forth, was a dweller in a House Boat — with large capitals. Later we came to have a suspicion that he was, after all, only a common, shiftless "shanty-boater." But no such suspicion could have been engendered then, though he was game-legged and blear-eyed, and though he proved upon acquaintance none too strenuous in upholding Truth. In regard to liquor his attitude was strictly *nolo contendere.* But in his actual presence his slight faults were reduced to a minimum — an infinitesimal and not-to-be-considered quantity — by a certain deprecatory condescension with which he reluctantly consented to allow his personality to be connected with the idea of actual physical effort. He was, in fact, a poet, with a soul full of romance; only the thought of assisting in a honeymoon made him at all our willing servant. But he knew the Mississippi from Grafton — he *said* to the sea, at any rate to St. Louis — and when he had

consented to engineer the construction of a floating home he set to work with the best of humor and good sense upon plans which should provide for every contingency.

"How much money you got?" he asked by way of reaching a basis of computation. The question touched me a bit too close. There was about one hundred and twenty-five dollars in the savings bank, and another week's salary from a newspaper to be counted on, and something to be spent before the wedding was over — and there was a girl who was used to the comfort and formality of a suburban home to be provided for properly after the boat was built and launched. For this was to be a honeymoon boat.

We are gypsies by nature, Janet and I. In the days of our courtship we had roamed the woods and fields together in happy freedom, or with some friendly book had found a deserted spot on the shore of Lake Michigan and had made camp for an hour or a day above the edge of the breakers. Van Dyke was our dearest treasure then, and with "Little Rivers" or "Fisherman's Luck," we sat for

hours beside a " friendship fire " on the sandy shore and journeyed together, gypsywise, in fancy.

So we had planned that when our wedding time should come we would throw aside our formal, conventional selves, and step for a brief season into the full fellowship of wanderers. We had visions of a traveling van, and of roaming in it by easy stages from lake to lake along the lovely roads of northeastern Illinois and southern Wisconsin. We had measured possible stages on the map and had planned and dreamed of our camping places and our outdoor life.

But fate was playing with us. This was to be no stepping aside for a day into this wander world, but a plunging full into the tide of a sea of which we had no knowledge or experience. During a whole year fate paved the way while we planned for other things. Every day of my work drove me steadily toward the Mississippi and every task which was assigned me by the editor had some relation to this water channel that reaches from the back door of Chicago down by the Great

Water to the Gulf of Mexico. "The Deep Waterway" was a slogan we helped to shout, and Janet waxed as enthusiastic over it as I did myself. Fate again intervening, the sight of an artist starting down this route in a house boat on a painting expedition caught our eyes two weeks before we were to be married.

The lure was too strong. A new plan crystallized in an instant. We too would be gypsies, — but water gypsies in a floating van. We would try a floating journey to the Southland which we hoped to find as easy and more romantic than the wagon journey to the north. Hastily we consulted maps, learned that a little craft could go through the Old Canal to the Illinois and down that river to the Mississippi, and down that mighty stream to its chief port. To plan was to act. I flew about the city, presenting the new plan to the city and Sunday editors and getting orders for special stories and for regular correspondence. A public commission added an order for a commercial report to figure in a memorial to Congress; and so at last, we were assured

that if we could once get the boat and ourselves under way we would, with no abnormal setbacks, be able to earn a living and pay our way back home again. This problem solved, it was only the preliminary financing that presently bothered me, when Mac presented his inquiry.

"The boat must cost less than one hundred dollars ready for traveling," I said. To my amazement and delight it was possible, and as Mac entered into the spirit of our plans the house boat soon took shape in fancy. That night, twenty miles from the Old Canal, Janet and I counted our funds and laid our plans, discovered economies and defined the hazards, and the next day the *Easy Way* began to take shape in fact.

It was Mac who insisted on laying the cabin floor upon the keelsons, in order that the height of wall and therefore the wind-resisting surface might be reduced, that we might drift more easily against contrary breezes. It was Mac who set the cabin aft and tilted up the forward deck. It was Mac who insisted on good clean pine in the hull, two-inch stuff

all through; and who put in the eight-by-twenty box five heavy, length-wise keelsons. Rock-reefs and snags and sandbars were old acquaintances of his, and he had seen lighter built boats go up against them with disastrous results. "When you're going six miles an hour and you stop sudden on a rock, it'll surprise you some," he said. "Especial, if your sides is thin." He had directed the efforts of Annie, his spouse, in many a gale while she labored heavily at the ash-sweeps to keep the boat off a lee bank, and had even (so it was whispered behind his back, last disgrace of a river man) deigned to take a hand in the work himself in an emergency! Whence he had come to estimate truly the value of a "squatty" effect. Heavily framed and heavily planked, with two-by-six timbers extending out two feet each side of the cabin to support the guard and bear transverse shocks, with gunwales two feet high and without a break from end to end, and lastly with heavy straps of iron on the outside, two and a half inches wide and half an inch thick, — so he built the hull of the *Easy Way*, while

Annie spun oakum for it and Mac's only son trailed an old tomato can across the seams and pitched them stoutly. The heavy braces and timbers seemed odd to us then, but later when the *Easy Way* lay for three hours pounding against a steep bank while seas broke against the side and their tops went over the roof, while trees crashed down in the woods close by and less stout craft went to the bottom or were torn asunder, we who clung to a stanchion in the dry cabin and saw not a drop of water enter nor a plank start were grateful for each bolt and spike and timber in her.

Annie, Mac's wife, was a voluble, slatternly creature, but with a good heart in spite of her loose habits of dress and character. She was all interest in the bride to be, and when Janet stole a day from her "sailmaking," as she nautically called her sewing, and made the long trip to see how her home was progressing, Annie seized upon her and did the honors. Through her own by-no-means immaculate house she marched her, showing with feminine pride the innumerable crannies in which a

shanty-boat woman has to store her extra supplies. Janet, enjoying hugely the humor of a first experience, exclaimed with amazement and delight at the crannies and the house, and the frumpy old dame of the shanties became our champion forthwith.

As we look back upon this encounter with Annie, in the perspective of later experience, it seems to have been the first real test of our fitness for what we were later to go through. Whatever roughing had come my way in the hustle for my living, Janet had remained a perfectly nice young person of the suburban type, instinctively drawing the lines of caste which appertain to suburbs, and thoroughly acclimated to a rich, hide-bound, prejudice-bound community, in which even to have described Annie as she was would have shocked and scandalized an entire assembly. Now she came among the very poor and plainly ugly, of whom Annie was the symbol; Annie, who got drunk often, swore coarsely, probably dipped snuff, beat Mac when he angered her, but for all that proved to Janet extraordinarily interesting. Just as I had hobnobbed

with Mac on our first encounter, so Janet rose at once to the full estate of partnership by taking Annie for what she was worth — and yet treating her as a lady.

While the *Easy Way* was building far out on the west side, and Janet was still sailmaking far on the north side, I covered the third grand division of the city in search of equipment, and finally discovered one Barnacle fastened, in fulfilment of his name, to the side of a street where his second-hand wares flowed out over the sidewalk and bade defiance to the rain. Dickens would have delighted in this old chap, whose mine of salables included everything to be found in the most eccentric households. I had a wagonload from him, and on the last day of my bachelorhood, a Sunday, mounted upon the top of the load, with Barnacle's man Charley to drive, traveled away to the Old Canal with my new-old possessions.

Charley examined the load with critical eye. His glance fell upon a wash-tub in which was neatly coiled some twenty fathoms of choice manila line, an inch in diameter.

"Buy that rope?" he asked with a nod of his head.

"Yes."

"How much 'd he," — with a backward nod — "git fer it."

"Two dollars."

"Humph! That 's my rope. Feller give it to me. Buy that lantern?"

"Yes, — paid a quarter."

"Humph! That 's my lantern. Brakeman I moved give it to me. Used that rope to h'ist pianners and the lantern to see with. Buy that tub?"

"Yes."

"Humph! That 's my tub, too. Seems like I can't keep nothin'. Old Barnacle jes' fastens tight on and clings to 'em till he gits a chance to sell. He 'd sell his immortal soul if he knowed where he could git another, and mine, too, if I left it lyin' around the shop whilst I was off with the wagon."

So it was somehow with the feeling of being the receiver of stolen property that I dumped bacon and ham, chairs, tables, stove, canned goods, trunk and books and other im-

pedimenta into the cabin about which before nightfall walls were to be built.

With what little help Chum and I could give after office hours, Mac had planned and built and turned upright the hull. Later, under a broiling sun, a whole colony descended upon the South Branch to help the work along.

Above the hull rose a single room of a cabin, with a roof held on stout carlines so that we might use it for an upper deck. There was a window in each side and in the bow, and a door in either end. All around extended a two-foot guard, and forward hung an extended deck twelve feet across and eight feet fore and aft.

Chum, temporarily abandoning the law, painted the roof with more strength than dexterity. His brother and mine drilled holes and bolted on the straps. Mac and a hired helper laboriously fastened to the timbers carved oak cavils he had dug up from some cranny, to hold our lines; and the crew of a tug, with jolly good will, left their vessel at the elevator to assist me in

putting on the cabin walls. Too much help affronted Mac, as a jarring element in a romance, and he left in high dudgeon; but an enthusiastic sister of mine, sawing straighter than woman ever sawed before, built the after deck in shipshape fashion. Tugmen brought lines and tackle to equip a possible square-sail, and another tug threw a line ashore and dragged the complete house boat into the water; and so, amid great whistling and cheering, the *Easy Way* was floated.

When the minister had made us one, and we came out to Bridgeport to take possession, we found Mac's energy had entirely waned with the launching. The bunk he had promised to build was as yet unshaped, the floor unlaid, the lumber to make them lay unsawed on the roof. The sweeps were unmounted — twelve-foot ash oars — and there was no hole cut for the stovepipe. Within the cabin, piled on and between the keelsons, was a nondescript mass of freight where it had been dumped from the wagon before the walls were set up. It had been somewhat disarranged by the launching, but the stove — triumph of

second-hand bargaining — was still on top, and the china and groceries were still on the bottom. In between were two steamer chairs, a hammock, a tub of ropes, a deal table, two common kitchen chairs, a crate of books, a lot of tinware, and all the odds and ends of camping-out housekeeping, with my old leather trunk for a bracer. It was to such a house that I brought my astonished bride. But by nightfall the *Easy Way* was homey. The books were in their places on shelves, a set of Lowell hobnobbing with "Huckleberry Finn," the "Little Minister" and "Life on the Mississippi." The dishes had found security behind ledges on other shelves, made from odds and ends of flooring. The floor was laid, the steamer chairs unfolded, the bunk built and the bed made, the lamp filled and lighted, the table spread, the oars hung on hooks from the rafters, and, through a newly-cut hole in the after wall, projected the outlet of a piping-hot stove.

The gale which demolished Galveston swept up the Mississippi valley to the Chicago Divide and there crossed over to the basin of

the Great Lakes. It struck the western suburbs of Chicago with terrific force, demolishing smokestacks, unroofing buildings, and driving the surface of the streets in clouds in the faces of those who had to travel upon them. It piled the water of the river and of the ancient Illinois and Michigan canal into waves, ripped off the crests from these and sent them in spray high in air over the tops of wharves and lumber piles. At Bridgeport, where the canal and river meet, it howled and whistled about the roof of the *Easy Way*. The little vessel was moored to the piling close to the lock of the gate — the mooring of an inexperienced boatman who, a week later, would have hung his vessel easily in a hammock of lines well away from the shore. Now and again MacEwen of the lock or his assistant came along the bank with an armful of split kindlings, a pike pole or some other friendly gift; and a head bobbed out of the doorway to exchange greetings with them. A few grains of rice on the roof of the boat, sheltered in the seams of the canvas, defied the gale to dislodge them. A pot of paint on

the bank told of frustrated attempts to decorate the walls with white bands and cupids.

An unpainted, rakish, but sturdy little vessel, newly joined together by a competent shipwright, was the *Easy Way;* and we, who were laying the floor and tying up curtains, who were as newly joined together and by as competent a joiner, we twain were captain and mate, cook, crew and passengers. My new wife was cooking our first supper in our first home — a wonderful supper, which I smell in savory memory now when I am hungered, a supper fit only for Gods and working men, a supper such as never in his life has Tsar Nicholas tasted the like of, and failing which he has missed a great thing, a supper — but why hesitate for similes when to every hungry American the names themselves conjure up all I could say — a supper of fried ham and eggs and boiled potatoes and bread and butter and tea.

The savor of it was in my nostrils then as it is in my memory now. It seemed a happy augury for the long journey we had in mind, the route of which we studied that night on

map and chart, and which was to take us fifteen hundred miles down the old Illinois and Michigan canal to the Illinois river, down the Illinois river to the Mississippi, and down the Mississippi to the Crescent Bend where river fleets and ocean steamers meet and transship their cargoes. The crinkly line across the map yielded no sign of what experiences might await us on the way. We only knew, dimly, indeed, of the bare possibility of it — that having been towed through the canal by a steamboat, we might drift with the current down the rivers, needing no other motive save the oars to overcome head winds or to move in or out from the bank, or the tiny sail which would help us in a fair breeze. A hundred feet or a hundred miles, we know not what might be the length of a day's drifting.

"It will take you six weeks," the Managing Editor had told us.

"Ten weeks is a minimum," insisted another wiseacre.

For ourselves, we made no guess, being content to go the whole journey and finish it when we might. Yet as we lay moored in the en-

trance to the Old Canal that night, waiting the steamer *Imperial* which would come next day to tow us on, Columbus himself, with all the experience he must have had in weary days and nights upon his quarter-deck, could not have conjured up more wonder nor more expectation over what the future might bring forth.

CHAPTER II

THE OLD CANAL

The Old Canal was a stream in Fairy Land. We fell in love with it. From the first thrilling moment when the towline, made fast to the stern of a barge ahead, lifted from the water and drew tense; when the *Easy Way,* from her position against the bank, swung lightly and easily out into the stream and followed its leader; when the shores began to slip by, the lock to dwindle in the distance, the figure of MacEwen, the gate-tender, and Barron, the fee-collector, to diminish as they stood waving their farewells at us — from that moment we looked upon the little channel as the road to Paradise.

Through the soft hours of a warm September afternoon we lounged in dreamy idleness in our steamer chairs upon the roof of the *Easy Way,* holding each other's hands in blissful comtemplation. Goldenrod and wild

asters in masses nodded at us from the bank, and gigantic sunflowers in magnificent profusion of bloom made for us a long avenue of gold, reaching back into the distance whence we had come, luring us onward, a way of promise toward the future. The steersman of the barge ahead, bashfully hesitant to turn our way lest he surprise us in some honeymoon demonstration, called notes of explanation, footnotes of history and geography, over his shoulder at us, to make clear the text of the passage. Now and again we swung close to the bank, to pass some upbound stone or coal boat, looking as old as the canal itself; no rude implement of rushing commerce, but the quaint survival of a bygone age in which the windowless stone warehouses on the bank, the abandoned quarries, the ruined wharves and bridges each had its part.

We swung through long arching avenues of elm trees, their tops meeting high overhead. We crossed tumbling creeks that dropped from the hillsides and gurgled under us as we crossed them — on narrow aqueducts, bridges of water arched above the land. We

drifted out upon the placid bosom of the Des Plaines and crossed it, and went for miles through the back dooryards of farmhouses, whence dogs barked at us, and hens and ducks ran clattering away, and children raced after us merrily. We drifted along the hillside and watched the Des Plaines below us grow into the Illinois. We saw the Kankakee merge into it, the Au Sable, and the Du Page. Sometimes the canal itself widened to a lake, and tiny islets, elm-crowned, stood out upon its bosom like graceful ornaments upon an artist's ocean. And now and again as we dropped lower and lower into the valley of the Great Water we came into an old lock, and settled through it in all the ease and solemnity with which this ancient manner of carriage is conducted.

We came to our first stone lock in the early evening, when the lights were just beginning to twinkle on the hillsides about us, and the silvery surface of the river down below still reflected at its edge a band of crimson from the sunset sky. Locks are but familiar devices to us now, but there is still present in memory

the imperfect, the half understood adventure of this passage; the coming in a bankful stream, in the breathless stillness of the evening, to a stone coping and a gate, beyond which yawned dimly a mysterious depth into which our consort had vanished; the twinkling lights, the voices hailing each other with startling distinctness to give familiar orders (so there were those to whom all this was familiar! to whom the mystery was not, to whom we were but another shanty-boat to be locked through — thought unthinkable) out of the darkness. Palls clanked. Unseen waters gurgled. Vaguely the gate swung open, and the *Easy Way*, itself hesitant, shrinking from the unknown ahead, entered. Silently the gates closed behind us and our house settled slowly, still mysteriously, into a deep well. About us all vanished; the dusky hillsides, the twinkling windows — themselves pregnant to us with their suggestion of other homes, of stationary lives through whose stations we thus moved silently, ghostlike, neighbors without neighborliness; of other lovers through whose lives we were passing thus unseen, unheeded,

A glimpse ahead

Dragging my eager wife and my reluctant house behind me

NEWTON, MASS.

neither speaking nor spoken to, regardless of what infinity of companionship, of aid, of comfort, of affection might lie, a germ in the seed, waiting but for the gentle stimulus of acquaintance to spring to life — all this that was in our minds and in the vale about us vanished in a moment, shut out by dark stone walls, felt rather than seen, which rose out of the water about us, slowly, ponderously, with a persistent suggestion of the incongruity of the idea that heavy stone walls could rise out of water; rose, bringing a new, a chilling atmosphere that seemed to add to the weird strangeness of it all, till we looked only up at the receding stars. Voices had ceased. Waters about us gurgled softly. Tiny waterfalls, innumerable and unseen, tinkled musically down from the sides of our prisoning well. We stood on the deck of the *Easy Way*, living it all intensely, silently. It was all that we had come to find, this new, strange world; it was all in this lock, that was no lock to us, but a miracle; and in the interminable instant that it lasted we passed finally and completely, beyond the possibility of re-

turn, from the old life, the commonplace life of the city of which our bachelor days had been a part, into the association of imagined things in which we were to live broadly ever after. It was but an instant; yet we were beyond recall when out of the darkness spoke distant voices, coarse, commonplace, calling above our heads. The wall before us gave. A sudden myriad of drops chinked and rippled into the water about us. In the darkness appeared a narrow rift, widening, giving a view of a starlit horizon, twinkling lights below us and far ahead, duskily looming hills and buildings nearer by, and, bulkily at hand, something huge, indescribable, from the summit of which the steersman called noisily for our towline. And as we moved softly out of the embrace of that wonderful gateway, we knew, and in a swift handclasp shared the possession of the knowledge, that wherever we might go, down the Great Water, in this *Easy Way* with its deal table, its shaded lamp, its comfort and simplicity, or beyond and beyond eternity, while we went thus together we should go not as visitors, but in our own home,

taking it with us as we now took it through this valley of the homes of others, through the stone gateway of the Old Canal.

There was in this a new pleasure for us we were soon to discover, in that this bringing of our own familiar, homely life with us on our wanderings gave us a standard, a judging point to which to relate the lives of those about us; so that we saw the familiar, the homely in them, and entered daily into the pleasures which these others about us found in their living. Yet none of them could share with us that which we shared together on such days as when we locked through beautiful Chanahon and in the windless basin below the lock set our table by an open window, and dined to the accompaniment of nature's harmonies. Through the open port came the scent of trees and of wildflowers, the songs of birds, the cool, sweet air that had passed across the water, the murmur of the woods and fields about us, reveling in the harvest. An arm's reach beneath the window sill was the water, and the gurgle of it against our hull blended enchantingly with the other sounds. Our open back

door gave us a glimpse astern of the lock-keeper's house, sheltered, as carefully as a babe in a cradle, in its nest of tenderly arching elms; the white coping of the lock, bordered by neatly clipped grass lawns, the hospitably open door through which we could see the crew of our towboat dining at a long table. We were gypsies by chance and by choice, and our lives might have begun and ended in the hours of such wedding feasts.

We came down to Morris that evening, and the towboat which brought us thus far left us at the bank, having to load corn and turn back to the city. Long lines of high-sided farm wagons were drawn up at the elevator. The hoisting machinery was still whirring despite the lateness of the hour, and the melodious clank-clanking of it sang into our ears the unfamiliar song of the corn-harvest. So little does Chicago know Illinois, so little the city understands the country, that though we, who were of the city, had seen all our lives the great steamers sailing away with golden argosies from the storage bins beside the river, it meant till now nothing to us of the life of

the interior of our state. In Chicago corn is a freight and a speculation. Slips of paper, tiny sacks of carefully sifted kernels, stand for shiploads and harvests of it. Machines do all that is done to it. No man handles it, feels it, knows it for what it is — the product of man's labor on the soil. But here we found it on its own stage. About us in the lowlands still stood, ten feet high, the ripening stalks that bore it. Here men plowed, planted, cultivated, gathered, shelled and shipped it. Here lives were spent on it and earned by it; and every yellow kernel in yonder wagons, in yonder elevator, lifted by the endless chain to shoot rattling into the hold of our deserting towboat, was a fragment of someone's season's work, of someone's winter life — the visible symbol of effort wisely spent, the promise of reward and the fulfilment of an earlier promise.

So we had here again that strong sense of being strangers in a homely, familiar world, or rather of witnessing strange, outlandish things in a familiar place; for we had still our home, still the cabin of the *Easy Way;* there on the shelves our dog-eared "Huckle-

berry Finn" hobnobbed as of old with the worn volumes of Lowell, with the "Little Minister" and "Fisherman's Luck," which had been our companions in courtship days. There was the wonderful in this, the wonderful which no amount of use was to make less strange, less delightful, in thus bringing our own life into juxtaposition with that of these outlanders; these people who, of course, we knew must live, yet whose lives were as vague nothings to us till we passed through them, sensed them and were gone — leaving a memory of them which is not, as that of so many travelers, the recollection of a constant change of scenery and the vivid image of some startling rock or cataract, but rather a substitution of people for names, of personalities for places; so that hearing the one we feel at once the other; with the result that this route we traveled is populated for us with people whose purposes, whose limitations, whose ambitions, whose handicaps, whose daily habits and whose manners of thought and action, we know sympathetically; so that there stands in our mind as our conception of the Mississippi valley not a great

river and its many tributaries, not the steamers and flats that ply it, not a picture of a map of many states, from mountain chain to mountain chain all drained by rivers flowing this way to the Gulf, but a thrilling consciousness of membership in an enormous community of active, eager people, all working and planning in different manners and yet with the same ultimate humanity at the base, a mass of people with all of whom we are in sympathy, who are knit and bound together by an infinity of associations and who drain into one great stream of life as naturally as their farms and villages drain into the Mississippi itself. It is this which one should gain in a measure from any travel; yet it is not to be gained by one who goes as a tourist on tour, as a sight-seer among spectacles, as a consciously superior being examining to see what defects these others have. It requires that one should go as a man among men, with a nascent humanity ready to unite with that of the other human atoms about him.

Even such speed as our easy-going leader made for us, therefore, taking two days to

accomplish the journey from Bridgeport to Morris, and giving us opportunity for meeting men at many places, was too great for us. We wanted to go more slowly, to see more of our fellows, to rub elbows with them as they lived. We wanted, too, more leisure to see and to appreciate the beautiful country in which we were. So when our towboat, having its hull crammed with rich yellow corn, turned back toward Chicago and left us to await the coming of another steamer which would hurry us on to the end of the canal, I made a towline fast to a corner of the deck, shouldered a home-made yoke, and set out slowly along the towpath, dragging behind me into new places my eager wife and my reluctant home.

A faint wind was blowing down the water, and dreamy September called us from the woods ahead. Illinois, that had been to us for so long a government and a map, was suddenly become our estate, our birthright. Hills and valleys, precipices, canyons, gorges, caves, broad green fields of winter wheat, sear yellow fields of corn, arching elms and scant-

leaved butternuts called to us, set themselves up for our notice and proclaimed themselves all ous. In mid-afternoon, when we had gone five miles or so from Morris, and my aching shoulders were thoroughly satisfied with the day's work, I hauled my house to the towpath, stepped upon the deck, and, with a thrust of the pike-pole, which my wife had wielded frequently during the day, sent us across to the "heelpath" side to a mooring among some willow trees where shade and beauty of landscape were combined. We left our house there, secure and snug, and went ashore upon a voyage of discovery.

One could not find a more charming change from the familiar routine of city life than this into which we were now thrust. Gone beyond recollection were all the little conveniences of daily habit. Water faucets had given place to the cedar pail, — a lighter substitute for the old oaken bucket, — and for electric lights and electric bells we had lamps and candles and our own whistles. Driftwood and fallen branches went under my axe as a ready substitute for fuel gas, and for eggs and milk

we went marketing, pail and basket in hand, to the nearest farmhouse, sometimes a mile away. These little journeys were great events for us each day, lengthening sometimes into calls and even visits with these people who shared our Illinois with us. It was a pleasure to find that as we were real and openly human with them, so were they with us, harboring no suspicion, but making us frankly part of their own communities.

Sometimes this brought us a glimpse of tragedy in these isolated homes. We strolled one day a mile across the fields to a farmhouse for a pail of milk and a pat of butter. It was a comfortable and hospitable home, but at the mention of Chicago in our talk a sudden silence fell upon the old farmer and his wife.

"My daughter," said the woman, slowly, her face working with grief, "is in Chicago. I don't know where or how she is. She went five years ago — to find a place. She writes no more. Did you ever hear of her? How can I find her?"

There was no mistaking the fear that lay behind her words — and we could offer her

little comfort. Our own hearts ached as we went away, thinking not only of the farmer and his wife, but of the other loser in the struggle in the city, ashamed to write, dreaming of this hospitable and comfortable home, held by the false pride of youth from returning.

Yet our own youth was irrepressible; we were no sooner back in our boat than the song of joy was in our hearts again. The breeze brought us the odor of crisping hazelnuts just touched by the lightest frost. Carp rose to the surface and splashed noisily about us, sending concentric ripples outward. We swung our feet over the edge of the deck and dangled fish lines in the water. From daylight till dark there was not a scene, there was scarcely a word, to connect us with that life, now so remote, when we had not been husband and wife.

It was on Friday when we left Morris. We spent Sunday in the bend above Seneca, held to the bank by a raging gale,—or rather the *Easy Way* was so detained, while we roamed the fields and visited distant farmhouses. On

Monday night we were at Marseilles, whose twinkling lights on the hilltops lured us on for an hour after sundown. And on Tuesday evening, in a drizzling rain, I stood in the cabin with a twelve-foot oar out through the back doorway, resting in a socket in the edge of the deck, and sculled our house across the aqueduct by which the canal is borne above Fox river, and then around a long and gentle curve into the city of Ottawa. We were coming into the Deer Park country now, to Starved Rock and Buffalo Rock and all that famous and beautiful region where Tonti waited so patiently for the lost La Salle, and where warring tribes of red men fought to extermination. We traveled reluctantly, and eagerly moored the *Easy Way* to climb to some hilltop for a view of the valley, or to stroll down to the bank of the increasing Illinois. So it was Saturday night again when we passed through Lock Thirteen at sunset and tied up in a sheltered and lovely pool below the gate. Great cliffs of stone towered above us on the right, and on Sunday morning we went over to them, seeking a good

spring of clear water, and found it at the mouth of a gorge which led back through many windings to other gorges, and to cliffs pierced with strange openings at many levels — cement mines, whence the stone was being conveyed to La Salle for treatment. We spent a morning there, and in the afternoon, while half La Salle watched up from its hillside windows, I slowly and wearily pulled the *Easy Way* over the last aqueduct to the last lock, and below it to the pool where canal and river meet, and where we were to make ready for our first real drifting upon the Illinois.

CHAPTER III

ADRIFT AT LAST

All the world had been manifesting its approval of our happy estate on this journey through the Old Canal. From the collector's office at Bridgeport to headquarters at Lockport, and thence to every lock along the way, the "story of our lives" had gone by telephone, with friendly messages to bespeak us the best of care. We had not been allowed to forget who we were nor why. And lest the canal-bank telephone do not enough for us, old friends in the Chicago newspaper offices had sent printed circulars and announcements to postmasters, chiefs of police, mayors and others presumably interested in decorating villages.

Many of these circulars and notices reached us, and typical of them was one which the blushing postmistress handed us at La Salle with a packet of letters neatly tied with white ribbons:

To the Residents of the Mississippi Valley, Greeting:

In the interests of science and in an endeavor to familiarize the people of your section of this great republic with the appearance of a native of the Windy City, John Mathews, a literary missionary, has set out to go among you.

Mr. Mathews is not only a missionary but a real poet. When he headed for your country the horseless carriage interests had annihilated every specimen of Pegasus in these wilds, so our representative secured the next best means of transportation, — a house boat. In this he set sail down the drainage canal, and in the course of a few days is like to tie up at your town wharf and engage in a study of your habits, customs and idiosyncrasies. When you sight his craft in the distance prepare to welcome him with becoming éclat, so that he may get a proper conception of your hospitality and so report to those who know little of you save what has been acquired by perusal of books of travel.

In honor of this great expedition Mr. Mathews has taken unto himself a bride, just before weighing anchor. This may not awaken any outburst of enthusiasm on your part, but is mentioned merely as a kindly suggestion that Cupids, white ribbons, hearts and arrows, will be appropriate decorations in case you feel it incumbent to decorate your city in his honor. A pickaninny band playing the

Lohengrin wedding march on cow-bells would also be a unique and appropriate feature of his reception.

Commending him to you as a splendid example of the sterling young men produced at the upper end of the lakes-to-the-gulf channel, we are,

Yours for a ship canal,

COMMITTEE.

CHICAGO, September 12, 1900.

There had been a couple of hundred people on the bridge over Deep Lock in Joliet when we passed beneath it, cheering us with the friendliest of good will; and an old dame puffed laboriously down to the water's edge to ask if we were "them new-wed folks" and to toss us a copy of a local paper with our story in it. At Morris an aged countryman, sitting on the bank, whittling, had watched us with speculative eye as we approached, and as we came abreast had hailed us:

"Well, you got this far, ain't you? Haow d' ye like it so far?"

The jolly woman who tended Lock Twelve called us her "children" when we arrived, and her "chickens" when we had been there ten minutes. And at La Salle, on that Sun-

day night when we sat by our table poring for the hundredth time over the map of the Illinois and writing up our journals, there came a cheery hail from the bank, with all the deep sonorousness of a voice from the vasty deep.

"Hello, on board *The Honeymoon!*" it said.

He might have been a bo'sun from that same deep — the huge, blue-suited sailor who came aboard when I opened the door. His face was tanned, his hands were big and red, there were tatooed illustrations of marine life upon his wrists, and he hitched himself along as if he were a seaman of the good ship *Pinafore.* He bobbed his head and touched his forelock in comic-opera style, till Janet began to hum to herself "In spite of all temptations to belong to other nations. . . ."

But there was no English about our visitor. He cast an eye of approval about the interior of our cabin, hauled a chair into easy proximity, stretched himself in it, let his eye rove about the room again, and nodded.

"Now," said he, "this is what I call shipshape. This is right nautical, and correct. I

heard tell all about you young folks and what your name is, — though it gets away from me this minute, — and so I says to myself: 'Them young folks,' I says, 'is going down into a part of the world that is strange to them but familiar to me. Out of my store of learning,' I says, 'I will take aboard of 'em, when they come along, enough to help 'em out when they strikes some difficulties they ain't expecting.'"

"That 's very kind of you," said we.

"Oho," said he, right heartily. "That ain't being kind. Now when I want to set out and be real kind to folks — but pass that by. This is just what you might call a neighborly visit, being as I 'm moored right next to you here in the Pool. I 'm aboard of that big New York yacht that come in behind you, piloting her down to New Orleans. I 'm the Sturgeon King, that 's who I am. Everybody on the river knows me, on account of the number of sturgeon I've captured. Fishing is my business. Piloting I do just to oblige folks. But there — that ain't what I come aboard for. I come to tell you about the river. How much do you know about it?"

"Nothing at all," said we.

"Well, that's good. That's good. Some young folks thinks they knows it all. I see you got a good stout boat here — had someone to help you that knowed the river, that's sure. Now in the first place, I'm going to —"

He cast an eye aloft and gazed for a moment reflectively at the twelve-foot oars securely suspended from the carlines.

"How d'ye cal'late to steer?" he said, abruptly.

"Don't reckon to steer," I answered, promptly. "Can't steer a drifting boat, you know."

He nodded approvingly. "Learned that, have ye? That's a good starter. Most folks seems to want a rudder and wheel in their drifters. What's them oars for?"

"Getting in and out of the current," said I, "and making landings."

"What you going to do when the wind's across the channel?"

"Stay on the bank."

"What about head winds?"

"If they are n't too strong I reckon we 'll hitch on to Charles William Albright."

I had been saving that last remark for an eye-opener for our visitor, and it was one. He had been tilted back in his chair, his eyes wandering about the cabin, his attention but indifferent. But at the sound of those three potent words — "Charles William Albright" — his chair legs slammed down to the floor, his mouth shut sharply, his eyes fixed me.

"Read it! Ain't you!" he ejaculated.

"Time and again," said we, in unison.

"Now ain't it the best book ever written?" he demanded. "Say, you folks will get along all right. I see that. Anyone who comes down here with that book in stock can't go far wrong on the Mississippi."

There may be among my readers those to whom the name of Charles William Albright conveys no such subtle understanding as it did to the Sturgeon King — but such are not of the Free Brotherhood of Lovers of the Mississippi. When Mark Twain had struggled some five or six years upon Huckleberry Finn's adventures and had not yet completed

A shanty-boat fisherman with his fike-nets

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that labor of love, he went on a "reminiscing" journey down the Great Water, and put his old memories and his new adventures into a volume of rambling anecdotes and more or less inaccurate information called "Life on the Mississippi." He ran Huck into the new volume, too, and gave him an adventure aboard a timber raft, which had become hoodooed by a mysterious barrel. This barrel drifted for days in the wake of the raft, and overtook it nightly, bringing thunderstorms and sudden death with it each time, until a determined raftsman hauled it aboard and opened it. He found in it the body of Charles William Albright, the murdered offspring of one of the raftsmen, and the latter thereupon, if memory serves me, jumped overboard and drowned. Huck was not upon the ill-fated raft, but upon another on which the tale was being told. He had swum aboard to gather information, and being found in his place of concealment and hauled naked into the firelight and asked his name, replied without hesitation, "Charles William Albright."

One of the characteristic features of the

missing barrel had been its ability to drift faster than anything else on the river. So of course when I "named it" to the Sturgeon King, I meant, in a general way, that we would fasten a line to some deep-sunk log or other drifting thing which would go ahead in spite of the wind, and would help tow us along. That, in fact, we did all the way down the river, to good advantage. But I meant a world more than that, and the old chap understood me — that we were following Mark Twain as a guide to his ancient haunt, and that when storms drove us to the bank we would act upon the example of Huckleberry Finn, and enjoy life investigating the idiosyncracies of folks "in Arkansas."

We could not have hit upon a happier appeal to the old river man. "Life on the Mississippi" was gospel to him. He knew its every page and anecdote, and was, I do not doubt, in the habit of passing as his own, the adventures and the information in it upon unread acquaintances. It put him on a new footing with us. He inquired if we had a good map, and when we produced Colonel Oc-

kerson's excellent charts of the river, he went over them with us, page by page, indicating whirlpools that we must look out for; chutes that were safe at certain stages; towns where we could find good supplies; and other interesting information. He told us where to fish for the best catfish, and how, where to get geese and ducks easiest — which we never did; how always to have good water by carrying a keg ashore every night, filling it and letting it settle (with a little corn meal on top of it to help the settling), and in the morning decanting the clear water into another vessel and bringing it aboard — and how to cure the effects of it by drinking pepper sauce! He told us the best places to tie up, and indicated ways of doing it. He advised us always to anchor, when we could, so as to be away from the bank, and to anchor under the lower side of a bar when we could — which we never did, because we had not then and never acquired an anchor; though we soon found his advice very good. We had expected to travel but ten or fifteen miles a day, but he gladdened our ears with the assurance that on fair travel-

ing days we would make from thirty to forty.

"Look out for caving banks," was his repeated instruction, which I gladly hand on to any who may be tempted to follow in our wake. "A steep bank that shows signs of having shifted recently is apt to cave or fall in at any moment. One night I tied up to one, not knowing any better, and in the middle of the night several tons of sand came down on one side of my boat. If it had been as small as yours we would have gone to the bottom. As it was we just escaped."

I had that advice later from Captain M. M. Patrick, in his office at the Mississippi River Commission in St. Louis, and found it very necessary for a stranger on the river. And when we were all stocked up and our chart thoroughly annotated, the Sturgeon King settled back in his steamer chair, and for hour after hour until the dark middle of the night rattled out anecdotes of the adventures of those who had come, as we were coming, down to the Great Water, knowing nothing of it. Weird were the tales, but vastly amus-

ing, and at the conclusion of each the old man settled deeper into his chair and chuckled till the whole boat shook with his jolly good humor. He ambled away at midnight and we never saw him again; but we never think back to the river or begin to recount our wanderings upon it, that we do not soon stumble upon some reference to the Sturgeon King.

They are jolly references now — memories of "Hennery B." and the widow who pursued and caught him; of "Pa and Beck," of "Smokin' Johnnies," and of shanty-boaters at Peoria, who "would steal the Lord's Supper and come back after the table-cloth." But on that delightfully peaceful Monday evening when, as the sun went down, I poled the *Easy Way* through the last little reach of canal from the Pool to the Illinois itself, they were memories of advice and suggestion, and of forewarnings as to the probable behavior of our vessel when it should be current-borne at last. Even with all that advice it was with considerable trepidation that we came to the plunge, and skimming close in to the up-stream side of the canal in order to escape

being dashed on the lower, — "dashed" being a word we used before we had experienced the current of the Illinois, — we suddenly perceived, without any forewarning jerk or thrill, that while the *Easy Way* apparently stood still upon the glassy surface of the water, the trees on the opposite bank were stalking slowly upstream, those upon the bank more rapidly, those at a distance more slowly, so that the whole grove had a twisting motion, continually foreshortening the front ranks at the expense of the more distant — by which we knew that our house boat was at last adrift upon a flowing river.

The Illinois here was not a wide stream, perhaps one hundred yards across, if memory serves me right; perhaps it was more. It was at a fair stage of water, so that the bank of the bottomland opposite, tree-covered and grassy, was but four or five feet above the water, and the intervening slope appeared from our side of the stream a grassy and inviting bank. On the right was the abrupt hillside of the two cities, La Salle and Peru, and, nearer, the stone revetment of the river-

bend. And in between was a ribbon of water without a flaw, with scarcely an eddy, without an audible murmur, with an appearance so peaceful, so trustworthy, so enticing, as to seem the natural habitat of honeymooners, given over entirely to thoughts not connected with the world about them.

I took in the pike pole and laid it down upon the roof within easy reach. Janet, who was beginning supper preparations, came out on deck, and we stood there in silence, watching La Salle drift back of us, and Peru begin to loom up ahead, while directly downstream from us enlarged the twinkling red lights of a big drawbridge. The current had swung us in close to the right-hand bank, which was the outside of a bend; to our delight and amazement it did not thrust us ashore, but kept us floating just out of reach of the rocks. The sun was quite hidden, the light was failing, the sky was still gorgeously colored, and twinkling glows were appearing upon the hillsides above us. In the cabin the tea-kettle sang noisily upon the stove. But on deck we two were the most peaceful, the most con-

tented, the most relaxed objects in the whole scene. It seemed that all the toil, all the worry of the canal towing, which during the last days had grown irksome, was over now, and that we had nothing more difficult ahead of us than to float thus, in absolute inertia, down a gentle river to the sea.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ILLINOIS

I DO not wonder that the old French voyageurs loved the Illinois, and risked their lives and their fortunes gladly to visit and to dwell by it. The fascination that it had for La Salle, for Tonti, for Joliet, for Marquette, and for the countless *coureurs du bois* who frequented this trail to the southwest, still lies upon it, waiting. Its clear water, its gentle current, its fretless channel, its green-clad, bordering hillsides, its fabulous grain-fields, its forests, — so deep that they seem impenetrable and uninhabited, — conspire to weave about the drifting traveler a spell which he is as loath as he is powerless to break. It combines in a peculiar way the brisk effectiveness of the North with the languorous charm of the South; for its borders are rich with the soft greens, and promising with the well-tilled prosperity

of the North, while the river itself opens to the Southland, yielding its fruits and taking its rewards from that region. The steamboats which ply its waters come not down from Chicago, but up from St. Louis, and bring exchanges from Memphis and New Orleans for the corn and cattle and lumber of the Illinois. The fish that are in it — the cat, the buffalo, the carp — are those of its southern associates, not of its northern neighbors. Its water may come from the cold, clear depths of Lake Michigan, but it is transformed speedily by the alchemy of association and destiny into the appealing warmth and gentleness of a southern stream. And so powerfully is this influence exerted upon all who come within its reach, that one may see hardly a mile of the river bank to which is not moored one, sometimes many, such floating homes as this in which we traveled — the occupants of which had yielded to the seduction and had become children of the great river; slaves of it, rather, gladly serving it.

Yet though they wander up and down the

stream, they are not true vagabonds; physically footloose they are mentally bound. In their river estate they are as provincial as any New Yorker, or as any New England villager. They are in fact water gypsies. Later on we came to know many of them well, and traveled considerable distances with them. Those were the genuine free-lances, the real river men, the representatives of those who in an earlier epoch were canoe voyagers and trappers, then flat and keel boatmen, then rafters in the great days of log and lumber rafting, and who on the passing of their chosen vocations themselves passed to the decks of steamboats, or, in love of freedom, built floating cabins for themselves and created the new class of " shanty-boaters."

Moored to the banks of the river in sheltered nooks and eddies where the prevailing winds could not blow too heavily upon them, or preferably hidden almost entirely from sight in the mouth of some creek or bayou, the dwellings of these water gypsies were as impatient of stability as their owners themselves. Bobbing up and down on the lightest

waves, tossing their heads impudently to the passing steamboats, tugging at their leash-lines with ill-concealed eagerness to be off, they awaited only the moment when these lines should be loosed from the pegs or tree-trunks to which they were fast, before slipping happily away with the ever-ready current. For most of the gypsies, too, livelihood was as easily shifted as home. The great bulk of these shanty-boaters whom we met upon the Illinois were by profession fishermen; they possessed — and in the amount of this one possession ranked their wealth and position — more or fewer hoops, large and small, heavily tarred, and connected in series, as distenders, in great bags of netting. These hoop-nets are called "fikes." The owner of them, having selected a favoring place in the river bank, runs out from shore a long line of stakes, driven each perpendicularly into the bottom, standing some distance above high water; and between these weaves a barrier of branches or, more commonly and more usefully, strings along them a barrier of netting. This "leader" turns in the fish which

come against it. This fike-netting industry on the upper part of the Illinois was a gift of the city of Chicago to the valley, its flow from the lake giving a clear sweet river in this upper portion, of greater and steadier depth, and of such a quality that where even catfish had not been able to live in any quantity, now silver perch, carp and even fine large bass abound in increasing numbers.

There were, of course, other industries — and lacks of industries — among these shanty-boat people. There was at Spring Valley, for instance, a boat of which the proprietor sent his two daughters to call upon us, to spy out the land and determine whether the keg upon our forward deck — acquired after the Sturgeon King's advice about settling river water — might not portend that we were rivals in keeping an illicit bar.

There was something the matter with these women, but what it was Janet could not for a time puzzle out. At last one of them demanded, coyly, "how many states" she had been in.

"I 've been in h-h-three," she hiccoughed,

and Janet discovered that she was even then in a fourth.

"The Rex 'll git you ef you ain't keerful," had been our last warning from the Sturgeon King, shouted after us as I sculled the *Easy Way* slowly out of the Canal Basin into the Illinois river. Janet, who had temporarily abandoned culinary operations to view from the roof our entrance upon the terrible stream, promptly paraphrased one of Riley's lines and sang with a merry refrain:

"And the Rexy-boat 'll git you ef you don't watch out."

As we look back on those early days of river travel it seems absurd that anyone could have been so lamentably ignorant of the characteristics of rivers as we then were. Turned loose on a river to-day, we pick out the channel by instinct, as we learned to do on the Mississippi. But the Illinois to us was all "Illinois." Anywhere on it we expected to go as fast as anywhere else on it. We thought of the river as of a ribbon of water from bank to bank moving uniformly downstream. We had

not learned that " channel " and " swiftwater " are practically synonymous terms, and that out of the magical groove they describe one is almost as apt to go upstream as down. When the first island confronted us we went down the chute behind it.

A night of mystery was that, the *Easy Way* going into odd little places we could not see. The chute was narrow, winding, clogged with logs and almost without current. I reached the bottom of the river with an oar and poled us along. Now and then a fallen tree impeded us and we felt our way around it. Sometimes a log was just deep enough under water for us to pass over it. We could see but the loom of the woods on each bank; nothing more, except the water where the light of our cabin lamp fell on it. I had a lantern on the roof for a time, but took it in, as it blinded me. And so, not knowing where we were or whither going, we had our first experience of the real troubles of running by night.

" And the Rexy-boat 'll git you ef you don't watch out," Janet sang again after supper,

and it was partly fear of that terrible steamboat, which in those days ruled the waters of the upper Illinois, which sent us down this chute. The *Rex* had a famous reputation for waves among canal people at La Salle, and as it would come up river at midnight and go back again at daybreak, we must be on the lookout against shipwreck.

About midnight, as we came out of the chute, a peculiar rustling sound, which grew steadily louder, was heard. Through it came the "fluff-fluff-fluff" of a steamboat's paddle-wheel beating the water. We stood on the deck watching, and there in midstream came a steamboat, brilliant from stem to stern with incandescent lights, with two arc lights over the forward deck, and with a searchlight streaming from the hurricane. It was the *Rex*. We clung to the eaves and waited for the terrible swells. The rustling came nearer and nearer as they broke on the bank below us. Then came a premonitory shiver, and the *Easy Way* bobbed its head, rose and fell, rose and fell, easily, on three or four tiny waves, a foot or so in height, which did not even slap the under-

side of our overhanging deck as we bobbed to meet them. We waited tensely for something worse to follow but nothing came.

I have spoken of the water-barrel which we had on the forward deck. Later, as we drifted out of the canal, a keg bobbed against us, and looking to the day when it might come handy, we took it also on deck. With the two ornamenting our "front porch" we had quite the appearance of a water-borne saloon. One morning on the Illinois we lay late at a mooring. I was chopping wood on the bank alongside and Janet was busy within when a cumbersome old Teuton lumbered up the shore and halted at our gang plank. The barrel and keg caught his eye.

"Herr Gott!" he ejaculated, heaving a mighty sigh. "Dot is fine now. You got dot beer, eh?" and he started up the plank.

"Hold on," said I; "keep off that boat."

"Keep off?" he demanded in surprise; "Vat for?"

"Private house. Keep out!" I said.

He looked at me in amazement. "Private house, eh? You ain't von of dem bumboats?

You ain't got some beer on board? Den vat for you got dose kegs, hey?"

It took some persuasion to induce the old chap to go away, but at last he did go, convinced not that we were not a "bumboat," but that we did not want his trade.

Janet baked her first bread on the Illinois, and the resultant tragedy is worth recording. It was also the first attempt at baking in Barnacle's second-hand stove. Put together and kneaded according to instructions and with the greatest care, it rose, as handsome a sponge as one would want to see. But we had not then discovered that we could not heat the bottom of the oven. When the bread had been in three quarters of an hour the top was deliciously brown — but we found the bottom pasty and uncooked.

"What shall I do?" demanded Janet.

"Do?" said I. "Nothing simpler. Turn the loaves bottom side up and bake it another hour."

So she did, that being the only way to get results. When it was thus doubly browned she drew out the squatty loaves, and looked

for a place to lay them while she was cooking supper and setting the table. The cabin was small, the shelves full, the table busy, the trunk occupied, the stove hot; there was but one place, — the foot of the bed. Carefully she rolled them in a red tablecloth and put them there.

Just at this moment I discovered something funny and came in to tell it. The chairs were occupied; as I have said, the stove was hot. I sat upon the foot of the bed. The narrative was progressing finely when the heat suddenly attracted my attention.

"Say!" I exclaimed; "what 's hot here?"

"My bread! My bread!" wailed Janet, and unrolled a crushed corpse from the red tablecloth.

Her grief over the loss of the bread, which was mashed beyond redemption, was too obvious. I felt certain that she was tremendously relieved that we would not be obliged to eat it. She dried it and rolled the whole ill-fated batch into crumbs.

She turned the laugh on me a few days later when, in a slack part of the river, I

thrust an oar down aft against the bottom, threw my weight upon it for a heavy lunge, and as it slipped from under me floundered off the deck into five feet of water. Janet, who had just come on deck, was overcome with a gale of laughter and refused to offer assistance. She added insult to injury, and when, at the next landing, we went to the general store and postoffice, she sent off postals to her friends inscribed merely "John fell overboard." Even this was not enough, for she forgot to address one of them in her hurry, and dragged me back to the postoffice to repair the omission. We found the postmaster in a broad grin, reading them all, and his grin gave way to guffaws as he selected the one without an address to hand back to us.

For the *Easy Way* the current of the Illinois provided a progress of perhaps ten or twelve miles a day when there was no wind to hold us back. Five miles we were always grateful for. We were often glad to have done three. And once when funds ran short and all our mail was mistakenly sent to Beardstown instead of Havana, we settled down to it, and

Pulled up for the winter. A shanty-boat on the bank.

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MASS.

accomplished twenty miles in a single run.

At Beardstown I hastened to the postoffice, leaving Janet in the cabin. Two men strolled down to the river bank, close by, and began slowly to put a new handle in an axe that had been lying there — the task requiring apparently all the skill of both of them. One of them gradually stopped working and addressed the other, regardless of the listening feminine ears.

"Bill," he said, "where 's your ol' woman?"

Bill also stopped, and considered.

"My ol' woman? Oh, — you mean Sal! Why, she ain't my ol' woman no more. She taken a great shine to Jake, and him to her. I see how things was comin' out, so I just traded her off to Jake for them gum boots I got in the cabin and a rifle I sold to Hank Busby."

I had not rigged my sweeps up when we left Chicago, but had an oarlock on the after deck. Standing on the narrow deck with the twelve-foot oar straight down in the water half its length, I sculled, when the wind blew,

to hold the boat with the current. Sometimes in pure joy of the exercise and of getting ahead, I sculled half the day, so that we went faster than the current — but never so fast that we could not run to the bank whenever we would, to see whatever was of interest to us.

Passing through the great locks of the river, the *Easy Way* appeared a tiny thing for which to swing the heavy machinery. But as we went along the way the lock-keepers, like the steamboat men, the shore folks and the water gypsies, all seemed to find pleasure in courtesy to us, and we of the *Easy Way* rejoiced in a kindliness which, as lovers ourselves, we could return and appreciate.

CHAPTER V

SOME CAREFREE TRAVELING

THE little god who sits up aloft looking out for the interests of Jacky must have had more than an occasional eye out for wandering honeymooners during that month of October. Otherwise the carelessness with which we navigated, the disregard of most elementary rules for safety, must surely have brought us disaster instead of leading, as it did, to the happiest of results. There was, for example, that misty night upon which we entered Peoria lake — Lake Crèvecœur, of La Salle — and left our fogbound home to find its own way to some mysterious shore.

It was mid-afternoon when I slipped the mooring lines of the *Easy Way* at the quaint old town of Chillicothe, and on a placid, unruffled river, drifted away downstream and around a bend into the entrance of the lake. Blackbirds

were migrating and along the riverside were thousands of them, great flocks, often deafening us with their shrill chatter as they swooped over our heads in their trial flights. Sunday picknickers in canoes and motor-boats, idled along the shaded border of the stream. As the afternoon waned and the *Easy Way* drifted more and more slowly, these accompanying pleasure-seekers turned shoreward. The blackbirds went to roost; the shores, growing more and more distant, became less and less distinct; and at last, when we came back to earth from some blissful imaginings, we were well out into the upper end of Peoria lake, with little or no current to move us, and the shores were out of sight.

Had we been less certain that no harm was coming to us on the Illinois our plight at that time might have worried us; but we were apparently under a charm. A very gentle breeze had sprung up unperceived, and when the twinkling stars gave us our direction I determined that it was blowing downstream and was helping us on our way. A few minutes later a rising mist hid the stars and the water

about us, and thenceforth we rode unseeing and unseen.

It had been our plan to stop next day at the little village of Spring Bay, on the east shore of the lake, for supplies and for fresh well-water. Spring Bay was some miles ahead of us in an unknown direction. There were no steamboats due either up or down, and so far as we knew we were the only creatures destined to spend that night on Peoria lake. It was a situation novel but too unexpected to seem anything but natural. We ate our supper in delicious contentment; then, warmly wrapped, mounted to the roof and endeavored to keep nautical watch through the fog. Finding that profitless, we set a lantern upon the roof to warn others of our whereabouts, and retired to the cabin to read aloud; and at midnight, being still adrift and still lost, went fretlessly to sleep, leaving the *Easy Way* to find her path, and the lantern to mark our place.

It was just daybreak when a slight bump against our hull aroused me. Remembering how I had left the boat, I hurried to the deck.

The morning was clear and bright, the fog had entirely disappeared, the breeze was barely stirring, and the *Easy Way* — oh, most wonderful of heaven-guided craft — lay with her bow gently scraping the steamboat landing of Spring Bay, at the end of a long causeway which jutted from the village into the lake.

Despite its natural beauty, Peoria lake is the *bête noir* of the river drifter, — the Crèvecœur indeed, — for it is almost entirely without current, and forms an eighteen-mile barrier past which the shanty-boater must row or pole his vessel in those rare days when there is no trace of wind opposing him. Yet it is one of the most beautiful lakes in Illinois, or in the middle west, — a long, narrow and irregular water, dotted with islands, surrounded by broad, level and fabulously fertile fields, green with corn in the spring and with wheat in the winter, and overlooked by towering cliffs and tumbling hills higher than are to be found at any other point along the river.

The slow stages by which we made our way through the lake were destined each to be

marked by some adventure. Money was scarce those days. Stories had gone back to the newspapers, but whether printed or not we had no means of knowing. As the larder diminished and the work increased, Janet rose bravely to every occasion, and when we moored on a windy morning at Mossville, emulating the example of a neighboring drifter, she got out tub and soap and began for the first time in her life to launder the family wash. Hour after hour she toiled at it, with aching back and increasing weariness, until a row of snowy linen and other less snowy but no less clean articles decorated the shrubbery on the bank. It was the first washing, and I think the last, — owing to a difference of opinion, in which the man of the house finally triumphed.

Another day we lay at Prospect Point, and leaving the boat there, went by foot and by trolley to Peoria. Fortunate event! In a news-stand we found our paper — and our stories in it; and in the postoffice our first check.

We found shelter at last in a nook by the pumping station at Tonti, where a point of

willows screened us from the wind, and lay there a couple of days waiting for an opportunity to progress — meantime making daily excursions into the city.

There was a "Corn Carnival" in progress in the city, — an annual festival of the harvest, which was vastly beguiling. The fair grounds, with their sideshows, were crowded with city folks and with farmers "jes' a-rubberin'," as one of them told us. The streets of Cairo and all the old-time shows were on hand. And up and down the thoroughfares were cane games, nigger-heads, medicine fakers, and, continually at work, an interesting charlatan, who claimed to be giving away, at the special request of Mr. Thomas A. Edison, ear-rings and other ornaments of the new metal "elecktron" with every cake of soap he sold for a quarter.

"Tickler, tickler, git yer come-back-tickler," was a cry that resounded continuously, and after nightfall the young folks went down the streets armed with these strange affairs, which thrust out suddenly, tickled the ear of a startled passer-by, and returned to the case in the pro-

prietor's hand before the tickled one could turn around. Confetti was everywhere, and merriment reigned till the small hours.

One night when we returned from this festival to our mooring at Tonti we were wakened by a terrific gale which lashed the lake to fury and drove torrents of rain before it; and soon discovered that the whole force of the wind was directly toward the Narrows, our exit from the lake. It was too good an opportunity to lose even at the risk involved in running at night in such a storm. I hauled in the lines and shoved the boat from shore. The little *Easy Way*, unused to such rough traveling, careened far over before the wind, then, as she felt the waves in full force, rolled and pitched frightfully on them; but nevertheless traveled, broadside, at such rate as she had never traveled before, straight in the direction she should go. By three o'clock in the morning, or perhaps a little earlier, I put out the sweeps and rounded to under the protection of the point at the Narrows, in a quiet nook, satisfied that a clear way lay before us. Two nights later, when there was no wind at

all, we got under way at sundown, drifted slowly down till we felt the increasing current of the outlet, and in a darkness so intense that we could see nothing around us but the looming red lights of the drawbridge ahead, went swiftly out of the lake, through the draw into the river, and in a deepening fog tied up to wait for daylight.

Our methods of navigation at this time were, in fact, as inexcusable as one of Mr. Henry James's sentences. We started in the morning, as he does, with the best of intentions; but as the day wore on, wandered into devious channels without reason and without restraint. The setting of the sun was no ending of the day to us; for, if we felt so inclined, we drifted to the shore, threw a line over the projecting limb of a willow tree, or carried it inland to the trunk, and so lay with the hull of our vessel against the bank till the crack of dawn; or, as was more apt to be the case, let the sun and daylight go whither they listed, and floated in darkness at the river's convenience down the gentle pathway of the stream. So it was we went through No Man's Land, hav-

ing locked through Copperas Creek in the late afternoon, and coming into the almost impenetrable fastnesses of the great swamp at dusk. Not far ahead of us, when darkness settled, a light twinkled oddly under the gloom of the overhanging woods. We speculated on it, watching it from our deck as we drew down on it, and found, when we were at last abreast, that it was the eye of a searchlight, held by a fisherman in a dugout skiff, who drifted slowly along under the bank with a dip net in his other hand, and frequently scooped up immense frogs which sat on the edge of the shore, fascinated by the glare. Later even this light was lost to us, and in absolute blackness we drifted on. The *Easy Way* wended her own gait again, while we played parchesi on the cabin table, or read aloud. In the deep woods on either side were numbers of great hoot-owls, whose mellow notes — among the most musical sounds in nature — boomed almost without interruption, — "who–who–, who–whoooo, who–who, who–who–o–o–o–o–ooo," — the last sound dying away in a subterranean chuckle which neither the typewriter

nor the human voice can imitate. Near and far among the fastnesses, too, were countless screech-owls, whose shrill treble trills, so often described as weird and ghastly, seemed to us rather friendly and companionable, hailing sounds of friends in this enveloping dark. As we came down toward the middle of the night, — for as we look back upon this part of the Illinois it seems to us almost to be banded in black-and-white strips, according as we traveled through them, by day or by night, and each location has its place, not in a county or a bend but in a noontime or a midnight, — far ahead of us we heard the intermittent baying of a dog. It was now to the left of us, now to the right, as the river twisted, and sometimes right ahead; and as it grew plainer we heard, in the intermissions of it, its echo, winding back and forth among the river-bends. When at last we were in the same reach of river with it and with the dog who stood upon the bank baying, we solved what had appeared a mystery. For the dog was baying to the echo in sheer loneliness; standing silent to listen while the farthest, faintest

repetition of his voice was to be heard; then, the instant it had vanished, breaking out again into a swift succession of bays which he halted as the first tone came back from the opposite woods. We were an hour or more coming down upon him, and another hour within hearing when we had passed — and we think back still to that swamp in the middle of No Man's Land as to a place where stands eternally a dog, baying to the echoes, making the night musical or hideous, according as the ear of the listener is opened for the sounds that may come to him, or only for the accustomed notes of civilization. When it was gone we slept at last, I arising now and again to find how the boat did, and often having to go on deck and pole her out of the clutches of a fike-netter's leader and set her again in the fair way of the current.

Followed, some days later, our first day of actual sailing upon the Illinois, when, with a howling northeasterly gale dead aft, I set a square-sail upon a yard forward, and with the steering oar out of the after door laid my course before the wind for La Grange and the

first federal dam. That was a day of strenuous labors, so that Janet fed me my breakfast while I clutched at the tiller and sheets; but the second day after, the seventeenth of October, is marked in red in the Logbook of the *Easy Way*, and in the memories of her crew, as the first of those memorable days when in sheer contentment we "sat on the roof and sang."

Oh, day of blessed memory! I have not space to tell in detail of the cool and quiet little chute down which we went to dodge the swells of the lower-river packet *Bald Eagle;* nor of the reds and browns of autumnal foliage; nor of the feeling here again so strong with us of moving ourselves, home and all, bodily into the life of a new community as we tied up before the village of Naples and went ashore for mail. It was the afternoon which counted, and which counts yet, for the whole of that beautiful day.

It was a still, soft, peaceful afternoon, dreamy and perfect. Now and then a breath of wind came gently to us, but barely strong enough to float the filmy threads on which

black and gold spiders were traveling across the water. On the glassy surface of a fairy river idled the *Easy Way* unguided, unassisted. The gentle current had us in its keeping, and with no one to see that we were lovers, unafraid, we sat in our easy-chairs upon the roof, side by side, holding hands, like country sweethearts, and singing all the old songs we could remember. "Annie Laurie" and "Fair Harvard," snatches from "Olivette" and from the "Bohemian Girl," followed the "Flower Song" and many another from the old operas, and were echoed back to us from the woods on either side or from broad hills that rose beyond the broad bottomland fields just greening with winter wheat.

Along the edge of the roof a dozen or more gossamer filaments had become attached, and as we drifted through the still air they streamed out in the sunlight astern like silken banners, more lovely than anything man can devise. We had come to nature and she had decorated us with these badges as her own. The sun traveled slowly down the western sky as we passed islands and rounded bends, al-

ways borne by the scarce discernible current. We had no thought for the material things of the world then. We were in the land of the ideal, and neither supper-time nor sunset could call us out of it.

It was Honeymoon Land, all this. The Managing Editor, to discourage us, had held out the theory that no man and woman, newly wedded and without lifelong habits together, could be, as we were, thus shut up together in a single cabin, away from our friends, and, at the end of a few weeks, remain on speaking terms. Our friends argued from the same point of view. Idle and insensate folks! They knew not Janet. That same adaptability and resource which had enabled her to take Mac's Annie at her proper worth, to receive the Sturgeon King as an honored guest, and to remain courteous during the trying call of three drunken shanty-boat "ladies" spying us out, — the courage that made her turn to the hardest tasks without flinching, — all this and more would not show them the wonderful spirit, the comradeship, the equality in fellowship that my new wife developed as the days

progressed. Fellowship and understanding — with them the prophecy of the Managing Editor — was wide of the mark. To us, who were making the trip, it seemed that every day thus spent together was a new bond; each beautiful thought, each fine experience a new link between us. We were multiplying momentarily the associations which, after all, in a friendship, as in the functions of a man's mind, knit the present to the past to make life enjoyable and companionship a source of happiness.

This we were finding daily, and we were so to find it on the whole journey. Our lives ran as smoothly as, on such a day, the *Easy Way* drifted. And when there came incidents more abrupt, interruption to the easy progress, they were but instances to prove to each the dependability of the other.

We each had our work to do, these days. In many ways the little cabin was more trouble for the housekeeper than a more ample home. To go from front to rear it was necessary to disturb its order by moving chairs out of the passage-way, which with chairs in it became

the sitting-room. The kitchen table, cleared of dishes, became the library table. The trunks became sofas by virtue of their coverings. Mud from the river bank made sweeping necessary many times a day, and the use of roughly chopped wood from the shore gave more dirt entrance.

There were days when I labored incessantly against the winds; and there were others when, unable to drift, we went for long walks to enjoy the country and to add to our store of mutual experiences. When we had passed Kampsville, and below the last dam found twenty miles of currentless river to be passed over, a real struggle began. The Mississippi was "up" and had backed into the Illinois. Progress could only be made by sculling and by taking advantage of favorable breezes. It was a swampy country. Ducks flew up out of the bushes within oar's length of us. But malarial mosquitoes flew up too, and one sunny morning found me stretched out with chills and fever. We were against the bank at a point where a causeway led across the swamp to the foot of the bluff two miles away. It

was then that the burden fell heaviest on Janet. Unwilling to risk water from the stagnant river and determined that I should have good water and milk as well, she trudged two weary miles to a farm in the distant hills and brought the full pails back with her. It was not the first, nor was it the last, of the experiences which taught us to rely upon each other; but it remains unforgettable — one of those "taken-for-granted" things which add much to the happiness of later life. Times when wreck and death seemed imminent brought us into the closest partnership; and it seemed to me then, as it does to-day, that nothing I can ever do will adequately compensate for those miles of tramping under a hot sun, that aching back, those weary shoulders unaccustomed to such burden, that expression of concern, yet of infinite tenderness as she returned. It was such welding that gave to our house-boat honeymoon the validity of almost a lifetime of experience.

But fever and chills vanished before good nursing and a determination to get along. The stagnant twenty miles were at last over-

come. And on a Saturday, the last in October, long after the sun had set and darkness had descended, we moored the *Easy Way* to the Illinois shore, where the morning light would show us the Mississippi.

CHAPTER VI

THE MISSISSIPPI

THE Mississippi! The Great Water! For days the words have sung in our ears waking and sleeping. Innumerable visions of the mighty flood have been conjured up, held place for an hour, and faded away, driven from the mind by some grander, more wonderful conception. In those last days upon the Illinois, days of constant toil in the currentless backwater, of fever and illness from the stagnant, miasmatic overflow, the thought had ever buoyed us up that around but a few more bends we would come at last to the Mississippi.

Twelve Mile and Nine Mile points were passed, and then each succeeding milepost on our map meant, not that much less labor to accomplish, that much more progress made, but rather so many moments less till we

beheld with our bodily eyes that which our mental vision had depicted for us in so many guises. We spoke often of Marquette then, and in our eagerness shared, perhaps, the thoughts of that noble Jesuit as his canoe, strongly paddled, swept down through the last reaches of the Wisconsin toward the very stream we were now approaching. We pictured his standing with the trader Joliet upon the shore opposite the beautiful bluffs of McGregor gazing out upon the blue water, broken by dainty islets and fringed with emerald woodlands; standing there filled with unutterable awe and happiness, seeking, seeking for some word, some phrase with which to describe it aptly, and at last choosing for it the most beautiful symbol of his faith and naming it "River of the Conception."

So might we come to it, we thought; and when, on that Saturday night we moored the *Easy Way* long after dark in a little tunnel-like opening in the willows, at the village of Grafton, we were overjoyed that it was thus, in darkness, that we came to this place whence, next morning, we would look out upon

Majesty with the sun rising above the hills at our back and investing with an added glory islet and wood and rocky bluff. We talked of it that evening in our cabin and, sleeping, dreamed of it. And in the morning at the crack of day we ran to the rear cabin door and threw it open and gazed eagerly, to see —

Fog, white, impenetrable, and beside that nothing. The dripping walls of the *Easy Way* brushed gently on either side against the embracing willows, scarcely discernible even at so short a distance. Directly at the stern of the boat the gloomy water was visible, but a dozen feet away it faded into the whiteness of the mist. Through this blanket of vapor there came to us no murmur, no rippling, no sound of any sort to signify that flowing water was within a hundred miles of us. The penetrating, damp cold of the early morning, the white fog, the *Easy Way* and the embracing willows, these made up the world to us beyond which there was nothing known, nothing certain, only surmise, imagination, untried swift current, rocks, sandbars, — and

farther and farther beyond, the Southland toward which we were impelled as strongly as the great river toward the Gulf. And with that recklessness which served us well upon the Illinois but which might have cost our lives on the larger river, I slipped our moorings from their stakes, pushed gently against the bank, and sent the *Easy Way*, with soft rubbings and slappings against the willows, slowly out of the little shelter in which she lay, into the white unseen.

It may have been an hour, perhaps a fourth that time, that I had been sculling away from what I believed to be the shore, when at last I drew in my oar and putting it on the deck gave over attempting to guide the vessel. The mist had lightened somewhat, but still concealed everything from our deck. Now and again there came to our ears faint musical gurgling as of waters eddying. We strained our eyes first this way and then that, not knowing in which way lay the nearer shore and in which the Mississippi. Only we were certain, so clear was the water about us, that we had not yet entered the more turbulent

stream. At last Janet caught at my sleeve and pointed. I peered ahead anxiously. Dimly I saw that the waters swirled and eddied but a rod away. Mingling with the clear green were murky brown patches, which seemed to break away from a more swiftly flowing body. The fog lifted slightly — and we saw. And after all our visions, of green isles, of towering bluffs, of sun-kissed ripples and green woods — this is all we saw; a brownish-green surface, and at its edge, as we were swept across it, eddies bubbling and boiling, churning upward unceasingly, and carrying away to churn upward again swirls of water-borne sand. The mist still hung about us, and on every side was silence, but we three, my wife, the *Easy Way* and I, were moving swiftly through that white, clinging silence toward we knew not what. We had missed that Marquette-like glimpse of the Great Water from its shore — yet not Marquette himself ever voyaged more adventurously than we, thus attempting our first cruise on the Mississippi in the morning fog.

Yet, after all, nothing could have been more appropriate than this introduction to the Mississippi. So long had it been our daily theme, so long had we wondered how it would appear to us, so differently had we pictured it, as a thing of wonderful beauty and as a stormy and terrible monster, so often had we thought of the time when the idly drifting *Easy Way* should suddenly lurch and swing into the grasp of the Great Water and plunge at ungovernable pace into whirlpools, rock-dams, snags and sandbars, that no ordinary sight of the reality could have satisfied us. Hidden in this all-enwrapping fog, our illusions were preserved. We stood on the deck lost in the mist, and wondered and were delighted. We stood there and let the mystery and the greatness of it sink into us. We drank them deeply. This was what we had come to find. This was our first goal, the first sign of our real achievement. We had started on a trip down the Mississippi, and for weeks we had progressed but sluggishly; but at last here we were, on the very river. We had come to it ourselves, unaided. We

were in the midst of it, alone. Just how we would get ashore again, just what we would do out there — all that could be solved later. The thing was, we were on the Mississippi. To that extent we had achieved.

Then the river began to come to us, to make itself known to us, gradually. As yet we saw only the brownish water around us; now and again blue sky overhead. Then, suddenly, as we stood there looking, we knew. We saw over the top of the mist. We could see over — over and beyond, to a church steeple, nothing more; a church steeple about a quarter of a mile away, and madly racing — or so it seemed to us, for it was going (in relation to the *Easy Way*) upstream at the rate of three miles an hour. It was an uncanny sight, and yet a welcome one. The river speed, too, was being gently broken to us. In a moment there were houses and stores; then a steamboat on the ways, being built upon the bank; then the rocky hills; then the mist burned away and we were passing Grafton; we were passing it rapidly; we were in the full swing of the Great Water, and it seemed

to us as if we were traveling as fast as a railroad train.

With equal suddenness disaster loomed ahead of us. We were bearing down, at this unwonted speed, upon a rocky promontory, which we were about to strike with a terrible blow. Though the *Easy Way* was built for hard use it was evident that if we struck those jagged rocks something would be hurt about the boat. I had had the current boards down, broad boards to grip the water deeply. Quickly I released them, and heading the boat offshore I began to scull as rapidly as I could, with half of the twelve-foot sweep in the water, turning and twisting as though my life depended on it. It was in vain. I could not check or sensibly lessen our approach to that dreaded ledge. Finding that we would strike it anyway I prepared to fend off. I quit sculling, and braced myself, pike pole in hand, to sustain the shock and if possible to save the hull. We drove in until I had almost touched the rock, and then, without a jar, without a turn or any preliminary indication, the little house curved gently away

and, following the purposeful current, swept past the rock and out again, off toward the Missouri shore.

As we did not care to leave the Illinois shore, but had foolishly and in our ignorance made up our minds that we would stick to one side and not try to cross this dangerous river, I opposed this new movement by sculling in toward the bank. To my delight this now proved an easy thing to do, and I kept it up until, as we approached the shore, we ceased moving downstream and came to a stand — then slowly moved back up toward the rocky point and at last came to rest, in shallow water, against a shelving bank. On the point was a white board with an arrow pointing across the stream. There was also a light there. Had we but known it, this was a crossing, one of those places where the current, and with it the main channel, swings across from one shore to the other. But we were more concerned with another discovery. We had learned that on the Mississippi, for all its swift current, one can land without bumping, by coming into an eddy under a

point and drifting to shore. This solved a problem which had often worried us. We took the opportunity to gather driftwood, and then set out again.

To get the best of the drifting I set the current boards down four feet or so. They engaged a submerged dike before we had gone a mile. There were signs on the shore that said "dike" to pilots, and a perch at the outer end of it. It was one of those contraction dikes with which the river engineer narrows and deepens the channel. We struck it while drifting over, careened our house, spilled the dishes from the table with much clatter, and frightened ourselves half to death. But nothing more serious resulted.

Then, still in ignorance, we chose to go down behind an island on the Illinois side. As we came to the head of the chute we heard a roar, and suddenly swept over the top of another dike, or perhaps a reef, with about two inches to spare under our "keel;" and at the foot of the island we ran over another. Little things like this, even to people who were ignorant of the river, were hints to find the channel

and stay in it. Nevertheless, we clung to the Illinois side more or less faithfully all day, passing through the Alton rock dam in a gap that offered the only possible passing outside the channel, and finally fetching up at the levee, and landing in the very nose of an out-going steamboat. It was an arduous and a dangerous day's work, which in the minds of our friends was the logical result of traveling on Sunday. For my part I felt justified in all the risk we ran, and that my wife did so too was evident when she said, with a deep sigh of relief: "Well, that fog has helped us to escape the Frenches."

If I have not mentioned the French boys earlier it is not because they were not present in mind. We had many worries on the Illinois. But the whole impression which the river made on us was a peaceful and happy one.

Among the other notes which Janet has set down upon the pages of the Log, there are four phrases, designating the four stages of the voyage. On this page on which we emerge from the Illinois I find the words "A Journey in Serenity" and I know no better for describing

it. The little troubles were but passing things. Only this of the Frenches bade fair to be serious. The two brothers were river men by choice every winter, lake seamen in summer. They had built a skiff near where the *Easy Way* was put together and had formed a plan to go down when we did, in order that they might get the benefit of our lockage through the canal and river and so save their tolls — a matter of about five dollars.

We had little objection to the two men in themselves. They were big, rough, hearty fellows, though they looked like consummate villains. But as elements in a wedding journey they were distinctly out of place. We had sentimental reasons against having them with us. To this they added artlessly by telling us that our boat was unscientifically arranged, and that when we got well under way they would come aboard and help me tear everything to pieces and put it together again in the way they said every river man had it done, with the kitchen at the front door and the bunk at the back, and with other changes. As soon as they got the boat fixed up they would come

with us to board; my wife could as easily cook for four as for two, they said, and they would help me run the boat. They would tow theirs along for sleeping quarters and live on mine.

That was a "huckleberry beyond our persimmons." We began to drop behind. At first they waited and coached us; but as we were so continually "delayed" they at last went ahead in tow of a canal boat, calling back that they would wait for us at La Salle. We were very long getting to La Salle, and they went on; but they left word that they would await us at Grafton.

That was one reason why we were willing to run by Grafton in a fog. We escaped without being seen by any river man of them all, and now with clear consciences were ready to attempt the lower river.

All that is, however, by the way. We were on the Mississippi at last, and had arrived at Alton, just above the junction of the Missouri. We had kin-folks there to visit, and we had a hard bit of travel ahead of us. So we laid off, and began a series of trips to St.

Louis by boat, going down in the morning on the big sidewheeler *Spread Eagle* and coming back on her at night, to study the course of the channel and the eccentricities of the river.

There is a saying that one meets everyone he knows on Broadway. It is equally true of the Mississippi. One meets there everyone he knows who has ever been on the river. Just as sticks drift together in an eddy, so travelers by this waterway are thrown together. An instance came at Alton. There had been a time in Chicago some months earlier when a sternwheel steamboat had come in from the lake to the river, running without a license. The boat was seized and fined about five hundred dollars, — more than it was worth. As marine reporter I had a lot of fun out of the adventure. We were amazed to find them at Alton. They had evidently passed us on the way. Ignorant of my relation to their troubles, they showed me the story I had written, and said if they ever found out who wrote it they would skin him alive. Which I urged them to do — when they found him.

When we left Alton the owner of this little steamboat — the *Lulu G.* — offered to tow us to St. Louis; but Janet softly whispered "Hoo-doo," and I gently declined. They left Alton on Saturday morning. We followed in the afternoon, and as we swung into the crossing and passed over to the Missouri shore — following the channel we had studied with such care from the deck of the *Spread Eagle* — we had a last sight of *Lulu* piled up broadside on the top of a dike stretching out from the Illinois side of the river.

But we crowed a little too soon. We were coming down to the union of the Missouri and Mississippi, and anyone who trifles with the Father of Waters on his wedding day is taking chances.

The Missouri pours into the Mississippi a great, turbulent, yellow flood, a few miles below and opposite to Alton. The Mississippi is there pushed into a long bend on the Illinois side, and the green-brown water of the upper river is forced into a narrow part close to shore, while the smaller but swifter Missouri spreads out tawny yellow over a mile

or so between the line of demarcation and the Missouri side. This line of demarcation between the impinging waters is a curiously sharply defined one, a line of yellow bubbles floating down on both sides of it, whirling eddies marking the inequality of the bottom, but the waters apparently flowing many miles without mixing. At the foot of the long bend the current crosses to the Missouri side, then back toward Illinois, around the dangerous Chain of Rocks (where St. Louis draws its water supply), and, returning to Missouri, keeps near that side to St. Louis.

Upstream boats on the Mississippi customarily keep well out from shore in bends, so as to escape the swiftest current. In this Missouri bend they do not do this, because the Missouri part of the river is the swifter and more dangerous. They crowd right in on shore. We entered this bend at evening, intending to run through it and tie up in the slackwater at its foot, where the current made off to the Missouri shore. As we came into it a line of four steamboats, the Saturday night fleet out of St. Louis, started into the

foot of it. Had I known what I knew a little later, I would have pulled out into the stream and given them a wide berth. Instead, I clung to the bank. It was a steep cutting bank, which the engineers were preparing to revet. It was cut in scallops, perhaps fifty feet across, and each contained an eddy. We kept to the swiftest water, which just skirted the tips of the points. The bank was perfectly upright, and about thirty feet above our roof. The water under us may have been thirty or forty feet deep — probably was all of that.

We were half through the bend before I realized our predicament, and then it was too late to mend it. The steamers were at hand, each one with searchlight turned on us. They came on in echelon, the first none too far from shore, the last much nearer. Before we could do more than make the lamp secure they were on us. The first went by perhaps fifty feet away, the second forty. By this time we were in a mad cross sea, tossing, whirling, turning round and round, but taking scarcely a drop over the deck. My wife sat on the edge of

the bunk firmly clasping the lamp. I stood on deck gripping the roof and holding the signal lantern. The eddies and the waves roared, the steamboats whistled, the searchlights dazzled, and everything seemed to be turned to chaos. As the third boat went by, thirty feet away, there was a shrill whistle and a yell, and a gasoline launch darted out of the eddy ahead, turned quickly, just grazing our side, and disappeared into the turmoil upstream. Then the fourth boat was on us so close I could almost have touched it with a sweep. There was a crash of waves, a roar of caving bank; a mighty swell from the shore where the earth had fallen in swept our deck; and then the *Easy Way,* still afloat and unharmed, but with her crew thoroughly demoralized, glided into quieter water.

There were three more steamboats coming over the crossing by the Chain of Rocks. Unable to judge how far ahead was our anchorage (we could have made it easily), I took no chances but began working out into the stream. We lost the current and were

soon over a mud bar, with three or four feet of water under us. The moon was shining and we could see snags sticking up all around us. We slowly worked our way through them until two fishermen, coming upstream in a skiff, hailed us and warned us that if we went further by night we would run on Chain of Rocks. So I put a bow line on an ancient Missouri river snag, dropped down a hundred feet to another and put a stern line on that, hauled in the bow line till we lay half way between them, and made fast. There we lay, in three feet of water, snug as a bug in a rug. But it was a pretty weird experience for two young honeymooners. The river was falling a foot a day, and we might be marooned before we could get away. The snags might pull loose, or a dozen other things might happen to us. I was on deck with a sounding pole every hour during the night — and nearly every half hour; but daylight found us still afloat, and with the very first crack of dawn we were off, safely into the current, past the Chain of Rocks, and on, on, straight down to the Merchant's Bridge, and beyond

into the heart of St. Louis, where we tied up for the middle of the day.

This was a critical moment of our journey. Janet's family had urged us to try nothing more dangerous than the Illinois, and had even predicted in the wedding announcement that we would return from St. Louis. My own people wrote to the same purpose. Our ten weeks' leave of absence was almost expired, money came in but slowly, and winter was fast upon us. We went to the bank in "Oklahoma," the shanty-boat landing, walked ashore, and tried, away from the river, to convince ourselves that this was the end.

Our experiences since leaving Grafton showed that we were entering a stage of travail and striving, and of considerable danger; and I find these two words set down on the pages of the Log, in Janet's hand, as characterizing what we actually found. But the lure was on us. Our landing among the river gypsies was significant. We were of them. The settlement was breaking up and its members starting down ahead of the colder weather.

Shanty-boats at St. Louis — "Oklahoma"

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Yet we suffered some indecision even that Sunday when we strolled along sight-seeing in St. Louis. It must have been a jar of new apple butter which decided us. We saw a sign in the window of a shabby little grocery which happened to be open to trade, and acquired a brilliant yellow bowl as well as the sweet sauce we carried home in it. As we walked briskly back to the waterfront, carrying our treasure, the whole spirit of the adventure caught us again, in the thought of the simplicity and freedom of the home in which we should eat it. Without a word to each other, but with significant glances, we drew in our lines and went adrift again. When the boat was well out from shore we spread our apple butter on Janet's new — and very successful — bread; and then, our truant eyes meeting, laughed and shook hands on it like the run-aways we were. We knew then that we would go through with it, and we slipped down past St. Louis in the comparative quiet of Sunday afternoon, delighted to see this troublesome landmark slip astern.

Here was where our chart began. We had

Colonel John A. Ockerson's reproduction on a reduced scale of the Mississippi River Commission's charts from the Merchant's Bridge to the Gulf of Mexico. The channel — as it had existed a few years before — was marked on it with a dotted line, with all the islands, chutes, bayous, sloughs, plantations, landings, towns, and so forth, and we felt that we could now find our way. But the important thing was that, chart or no chart, we had gained in a few days more than an inkling of the way the river shaped itself, the way the current ran. We knew now where to look for mooring places, how to run the various reaches, and how to handle our boat. We had been tried in as hard a situation as we were apt to meet and had come through without harm. Our struggle, we felt, was half won. A great flock of geese went honking over the Eads Bridge as we went under it — geese moving south. It was the fourth of November. We felt that we had come in happy time for the southern migration. We, too, were geese. Perhaps it was instinct that was luring us south. Whatever it was, we

had been told often enough it was neither sense nor reason; we ran by St. Louis with a feeling of mad abandon, drifted down to Cahokia ferry and tied up for the night, so as to get away next day without having to run the gauntlet of the harbor on a business day; we ran down to Cahokia ferry with a feeling of unmixed devilment. We were real old river folks at last, tried and proven, very derelicts, so that the crowd that watched and ever watches the river from the beautiful bridge could not distinguish us from our friends the Frenches, or from Espanto the "Mexican medicine man," or Blake of the Chickasaw Ointment, or Billy Kuykendahl, the trader, or Billy Householder, the junk-removing expert, all of whose boats were drifting, as we were, out of the winter into the warmer south. Blackbirds, gypsies, geese and we — we were all of a kind.

CHAPTER VII

A PEOPLED RIVER

THE Mississippi is to us, as I have said, a river not of sandbars or of scenery, but of people. We were swept by the rocky columns of the Piasa, not unimpressed with the magnificence of those famous cliffs; the horrid bleakness of the off-channel shore was a thing of hourly comment with us. But it is the multitude which peoples the Great Water that remains with us vividly to this day, — a multitude which changes with every hour, and yet which is never changed; and this because it is the river itself which lures, which holds, which sways, and which gives character, so that those who float upon it, who fish its depths or who dwell upon its banks but reflect in a myriad facets the self-same characteristics. Meet them where you may, these river folk, as diverse as the moods of the Mississippi, are yet ever the same. We had

had upon the Illinois little glimpses of them that had seemed like broad acquaintance. Our first days upon the Great Water had brought us in touch with others of them. But it was not until that fair, still day in November, our first below St. Louis, when, rising before dawn and beginning our journey while the white mists still obscured all but the bright eye on Arsenal island, we floated easily and thoroughly "at home" down the placid channel of the broad river, that we felt stir within us and coming to consciousness the real fellowship we had with them.

Perhaps it came to us — it seems now to me as I try to single out the details of the recollection of that wonderful day, that it must have come to us — in the early forenoon; perhaps with our first acquaintance with the "Man in the Flat-iron Skiff." I look for him yet when I am on the Mississippi, though I know that his tiny craft was kindling wood years ago and that he may be serving under some insurrecto flag, or buried in a soldier's grave ten thousand miles away. For the "Man in the Flat-iron Skiff" was a soldier

of fortune, drifting in leisurely manner down the river to find what new adventure might await him at its mouth.

We came upon him, or first noticed him, about nine o'clock as we were passing Jefferson Barracks. He had come from a sandbar as we were nearing it, and, in a little wedge-shaped skiff not more than ten feet long, was curled up as comfortably and as lazily as a son of rest could wish to be. In the same current, in the same day, two boats will often drift with very different speeds. So we overhauled him slowly, came abreast, and finally passed him, and for an hour or more we exchanged greetings across the water. He was fishing, we found when we came near. About him, stretched for an eighth of a mile across the channel, was a line of jugs floating in the water. To the handle of each jug a line was attached, and at frequent intervals the overturning of a jug indicated that a fish had taken bait. When this happened the Man in the Skiff put out an oar in one of two horseshoes which were nailed, open end up, at the back corners of the skiff, sculled to the tipped-

up jug, removed the fish and rebaited the line.

That afternoon, when the wind had risen and the fishing was over for the day, he hoisted upon a mast at the very tip of the wedge an army blanket for a sail, and went rapidly past us and away downstream. But in the first encounter we had learned his story. He was a veteran of many enlistments and of many adventures in the Indian wars of the west, and his time expiring at a post in Montana in June, he had built the vessel in which we saw him, and had come in it nearly three thousand miles down the swift Missouri. On the way he had fished as we saw him now, had shot ducks and geese with a gun which he showed us, and had worked many days in harvest fields along the stream. He was going to Jackson Barracks at New Orleans to re-enlist, to try what different experiences might there befall him. He slept at night upon whatever sandbar was nearest when night fell, rolled up in the blanket which made his sail. Sometimes his upturned skiff kept off the rain. Sometimes he lay in it,

certain to wake in safety if a rising flood should carry it away. He acknowledged no duty to do more than this we saw him do, — to fish, to shoot, to drift, to eat and sleep. He lived — he earned his living with the rod and line. Beyond that Society had no care about him, and he was satisfied. He looked upon us as moved by the same things as himself, and marveled that we should prefer the *Easy Way* when a canvas cover over a roomy skiff would give a house more easily movable and as safe.

Just at noon, as we came down the rocky Missouri shore, drifting swiftly by gorgeous crags flaming with autumnal colors, we read on our chart the opening of the mouth of a little creek at the village of Kimswick. We chose it for our market-place. Coming close to it I brought the *Easy Way* to shore, caught up a line, sprang to the bank, and drew the little house boat around a corner into as lovely a creek as one could wish. Two grassy banks sloped gently down from the cleft rocks of the ancient river-wall, bordering the stream. Fruit trees hung above it on the slopes, and

back, and around a turn, flanked on all sides by the brilliant colors of the November leaves, were glimpses of white houses, — houses firmly fixed, houses on stone foundations, houses of stability and permanency, houses that could not be led by the nose as ours was, could not turn at will into whatever creek most pleased them, but must ever stand there in Kimswick, on the bankside, and be lived in by stay-at-homes. Surely, then, we knew we were of the river, not on it; for Janet and I both laughed aloud, happily, at the delicious absurdity of thus taking our house a-calling with us, and leaving it, while we went marketing, hitched like a horse, with its nose to a grassy bank, in this Kimswick creek.

So we bought steak and were still river folk — though when the butcher asked us if we would have a "ten cent pound" or a "fifteen cent pound," we were so ignorant as to have to ask the difference. It seemed that steak was "a bit a pound, two pounds for a quarter, single pounds fifteen cents," so we chose a fifteen-cent pound. When it proved to be two pounds and a half, he asked twenty cents for

it, which we paid, and were as satisfied as the butcher seemed to be.

We traveled nearly forty miles that day. This was real traveling, such as we had dreamed of but had not really thought was possible. But the next day we made only eleven, and, after fighting through a snaggy bend above Fort Chartres landing in the afternoon, lay moored below a dike through a stormy, weird night, while the wind howled above us, the *Easy Way* lifted and fell uneasily, straining at her tether, the rain fell in torrents, and a dozen times between dark and dawn I went the round of the deck to make sure the lines were holding and we were not to be blown out into the stream.

The wind howls and the rain drives on the land. Where I write it sweeps to-day across the forty miles of hills between me and gray Monadnock yonder and smites my windows with enormous force. But there is lacking something in it, some quality of danger, of elemental power, of chance, perhaps, that we found in it then when in our cozy cabin we read aloud from Mark Twain's tale of life

The horsepower ferry

on this self-same stream, and between chapters listened to the rush of it in the trees on the bank overhead, to the whistling or coughing of some passing steamer, or to the roaring swish of the rain on roof and windows. Some day, I think, when I am old, and my blood runs sluggishly, and I spend days curled up before an open fire, I will dream back to that wild night below the Fort Chartres dike, — not to the age-long struggle with the sculling oar, keeping the *Easy Way* from the waiting snags, not to the Kimswick creek and the Soldier of Fortune, but to that eerie, weird wildness which, felt without reason, stamps for its own such nights as that and marks them for a lifetime.

We went down the Okaw chute next day, the river flowing still and glassy, hiding its own swift ruthlessness, over the very place where once stood gay Kaskaskia, first capital of Illinois. Here Rodgers Clarke had come upon the dancing habitants and the watchless British; here Lincoln had argued roundly to a country jury; and from the broad veranda of yonder white house on the hillside old

Pierre Menard looked out over the stream to the broad acres beyond, to the fertile bottom-lands where his ancestors had settled and was content, while the rush and drive of the coming civilization swept on to St. Louis and to Chicago.

We found that we were not the only bridal couple on the stream; for as we drifted there came out from the Okaw into the larger stream a long and narrow skiff, over the stern of which on a pair of wagon hoops was mounted a canvas top like that of a gypsy's traveling van. In the front of this snug cabin sat a sweet-faced young woman — a country girl, fresh and rosy, with sparkling eyes and merry countenance; while at the oars sat a young man idly, the blades resting on the water, the handles crossed before him, while his gaze turned up the hillside where the girl pointed to the silhouetted rampart of old Fort Gage, half seen among the walnut trees. The chance of the current brought us soon together, and we found that they, like ourselves, had set out on their wedding day, to learn something of the lands downstream. Their journey was

to be less ambitious than ours. They had come from "up the Okaw" and they were bound for Cairo, where, if the stream were not too swift, they would turn up the Ohio and thence up the Wabash and the White to a point not far from their home; but if it were too swift for comfort they would go overland from Cairo. They had a tiny camp stove which they set up on the bank at meal times, and by drawing the skiff up on a sandbar they found comfortable sleeping quarters under the canvas cover, which could be extended a few feet forward. For bad weather they had thought they could stop at a village hotel.

That idea of stopping nightly at a village hotel amused us greatly — as old river folks; yet we had had ourselves the notion of the possibility, without any intention to take advantage of it. Book geography and fact geography are far apart. In the book maps the rivers are dotted with the names of places where one may expect hospitality; and, having studied these, a conservative and very scandalized relative of ours said, when she inspected the *Easy Way:*

"Of course you will go to a hotel every

night," — with the idea that nothing else would be quite respectable. Later when we learned that a week of stormbound idleness between even the smallest landings might be expected as a regular feature, we frequently repeated this suggestion to each other at nightfall as a reminder of our own (and other folks') impracticability.

We stopped at Chester that afternoon, a quaint city at the top and bottom of a hill. There is considerable rivalry there between the upper and the lower towns over the location of the postoffice. When it is below those uphill slide down to it; when it is above those below must climb a flight of steep stone steps set in the hillside — three hundred or more of them. When we called the office was at the top. A darky boy told us it was " jes' up dem steps," and as there were but a dozen in sight we started the ascent. Eventually we arrived at the summit of the bluff, and, when we had rested, were well rewarded by a wonderful panorama of the valley. But mail we found none, for, as the postmaster cheerfully informed us, the Chicago pouch had been

stolen the night before on its way up from the train.

The day we were at Chester was election day, and President McKinley was contesting for re-election. It was too early to hear of the result, and we returned to our boat to find half our dishes piled in fragments upon the floor of the cabin, as the result of an adventure with a passing steamboat in our absence. We gathered them up and threw them overboard — the shanty-boater's easy method of disposing of things he does not need — and drifted down past Crane's island to the high bank of Cape Rest.

Water froze in our settling pail that night nearly an inch thick; and for a blustering, frigid, wintry day we lay at the mooring. Heavily bundled in winter clothes, Janet and I walked briskly over the rough bottomland roads, past countless "white" hogs vainly rooting at the frozen ground, past hermetically sealed farmhouses, and at last back again to our warm and cozy cabin. We were a little worried that day at the coming of winter, and eager for a chance to run far-

ther south before the ice began to float down the river.

In the evening we went up to the little store and postoffice at the landing. A dozen chawterbacker farmers sat around, spitting at the stove. A big, fur-coated stage driver came in and threw a bundle of mail on the counter.

"Who 'd they 'lect, Dave?" demanded the assembled farmers.

"Old Bill himself," replied the driver.

"Which Bill?" queried a little weazened-up old man in the corner. "I got two bits bet on Bill Bryan I 'd hate to lose."

"Well, you lost it," said the stage driver. "It 's Bill McKinley."

The weazened-up farmer chuckled. "I ain't hit so bad," he said. "I hedged by betting two bits on McKinley, too."

We were gone before daylight on a still, wintry morning, skimming along a shore which was bordered with ice. I stood out on the after deck at the sculling oar, keeping the boat out of the bends where snags lay. The smoke pipe of our kitchen stove came through the after wall and ended conveniently near. When my

hands stiffened on the oar I had but to hold them over the vent to warm them promptly. We were in a wonderful region of the river now. The morning brought us to Grand Eddy and Seventy-six landing. We came out of a big bend where the government engineers were constructing riprap work, sweeping swiftly with the current, then by a quick use of the oars turned down under a projecting point, swept across a small space of revolving eddy, missed by a narrow margin the larger whirl which gives the place its name, and then, passing Red Rock, had the beautiful front of the Fountain Bluff standing like an opposing wall before us.

There are two of these straight-standing walls past which the Mississippi makes its way in close succession here. The Fountain Bluff, the first of them, stands opposite the noble front of Cape Cinque Hommes, an isolated peak in the bottomlands, long enough to hide from the traveler downstream the possibility of outlet. It was flaming with color when we rushed by its foot, and for many miles stood sentinel over our way. We turned the sharp angle in front of it, went down by the landing

of Wittenburg and its old mill, found the thin thread of current which leads to safety by the Devil's Bake Oven and the Devil's Back Bone on one hand and the one-time dangerous Tower Rock on the other, and turned straight down the Missouri shore in front of Grand Tower.

We lay in Bainbridge's creek that night, our little vessel sheltered from every sea, moored with lines to both banks so that it touched neither, and as comfortable as a cradle. We found an old couple in a house above who sold us the best of everything at the lowest price, and who told us that all their lives they had hungered to lock their doors and start, as we had started, down the river with the river multitude and learn and experience all that was below. The time had never come yet — "but some day" they said, and happily believed it would. And in the creek itself lay a flatboat, no more than an uncovered box, ten feet wide, thirty or so in length, and perhaps three deep, in the midst of which was pitched an ancient tent in which were living a man, a woman and three little children. They had built it somewhere in Illinois — at East St.

His travelling house — very typical

NEWTON FREE LIBRARY, NEWTON, MASS.

Louis if memory serves; and they too had caught the fever and started seaward. They had had money only for the hull, some traps, a gun and some fike-nets. The tent they had possessed. With this simple outfit they had started; fishing, trapping and shooting as they went, and selling the fruits in every market. Already they had earned a tidy nest-egg, and at Cairo were to tie up to build a deck over the hull and thus raise the tent above waterline; and perhaps, if they were prosperous enough, to begin a cabin.

The woman appeared tired. Housekeeping in such a tent with three children is no easy matter. But when her husband had gone out silently in his skiff to set his lines, and the glow of his pipe came back irregularly through the darkness, she sat on the edge of the hull over against our deck and told us about it — the relief from the monotony of a kitchen in a fixed spot in a city, the freedom, the wildness which somehow she had always craved.

"Don't you find it pretty hard, sometimes?" we asked.

She nodded silently, but looking out over

the river into the darkness where her husband was, and listening to the soft murmuring of the shore eddies at the mouth of the creek, she forgot all the troubles, all the storms, the cold, the weariness, the danger of swamping, the risk of illness; her face took on a new expression, almost of inspiration, in the soft glow from our cabin light, and she breathed deeply the pure, fine air of the river.

"Oh, but it's elegant, though!" she said, and though words failed her to say more we knew that she, too, was one of those to whom the vision is given, and that all that the poet feels was in her heart.

They are there to-day, I know. Some other woman in the Bainbridge creek, some other couple in their canvas-roofed skiff, some other wandering Soldier of Fortune with his gun and jug-lines. The river is there; and on its bank the same multitude listening to its siren whispers, listening to the mysterious, the never-understood yet ever-appealing murmuring of its eddies, longing endlessly to go, as these were going, with the Father of Waters, wherever his spirit might choose to lead them.

CHAPTER VIII

WE RUN AWAY FROM WINTER

Cold weather was rapidly coming on. Some day soon the dwellers in these houses beside the river would look out on a stream covered with running ice. Later these cakes would be forced and jammed together, and in a night the whole would freeze over. No travel then for shanty-boaters; every tiny craft would be hauled out on the bank, moored under the shelter of a dike or safely harbored in some such place as this Bainbridge creek. We on the *Easy Way* watched with much worry this rapid advance of winter. Ice in our settling pail was a bad sign. It meant that we must push ahead, must take all chances, must travel our fastest, lest we, too, be frozen in and made to spend a winter by the way or abandon our trip altogether.

So in the early morning of a cold November day, with frost on deck and ice in the pail,

we started from our safe harbor and caught the current southward. The river was still flowing strongly, but before we had been out half an hour the wind had come fresh out of the northeast; sullen, leaden clouds were piling up, and the first flakes of snow were sifting lightly through the air. The wind grew so strong that we were driven broadside on Devil Island bar, luckily on the steep, channel side, where there was ample water under us. For an hour I rested from my struggle at the sweep, and then for another hour chopped into firewood fine oak and walnut timber which had accumulated on the bar. Then, in a lull of the wind, we set out again and with much difficulty made shelter in a creek above the noble promontory of Cape Rock.

In all our river trip we had no more delightful camping place than that. The river had filled the creek to a depth of perhaps four feet, for a hundred yards in from the bank. The bottomland on both sides was covered with an open hardwood forest, richly yellow with autumnal covering. The creek was just

wide enough for us to enter, and when we had gone a little way upstream we found a turn and a widening. A tree had fallen across, making a bridge. We put out three lines, swinging our boat gently but securely, and there was no open way for waves from steamboats to come in from the river. The wind died down and the sun came out. The air warmed delightfully and the golden gleam of the leaves gave it even a warmer appearance. We walked some miles to Cape Girardeau — an ancient French capital of this vicinity, a town of several colleges and of fine, substantial, old stone houses — and brought home mail and supplies, and spent a peaceful night in the assurance that nothing could disturb us. And at the very break of day we were off again. The clouds had come, and the morning was threatening, but we were eager to get south, so we kept to the channel. Out around the beautiful cape we went, having up and down stream a gorgeous view of nut-brown and golden-brown hills, fading into stormy gray. The current carried us out around an eddy, then down

close by the levee of the town, along by the foot of a railway embankment where, on stilts above the water, were a score of shanty-boats serving as land-houses, tax free. We entered a great bend and at ten o'clock came in sight of the second of the mighty bluffs of the river, the great cliff above Thebes, over against the rocky nose of Gray's Point.

There is a bridge at Thebes now. In those days there were many railway transfer boats ferrying freight trains across. It is the last rocky reach on the river. There the Mississippi, after twisting and turning in an endeavor to keep to its old hills, finds itself foiled in its moves, and sweeps at last through a boulder-strewn channel, dragging steamboats and drifters over jagged rocks and through devious ways where it may wreck them unawares, spiting itself for its enforced abandonment of its noble cliffs.

These reefs make even to-day a horrible barrier, though the government has removed the worst of them. On our chart we saw then listed "rocks," more "rocks," then "Grand Chain of Rocks," "Little Chain of

Rocks," "Boulder," "Counterfeit Rock," and last of all, far below the rest, "Beaver Dam Rock," in the very middle of the channel. We came around the bend at Gray's Point to the first rocky part, and with the chart before us picked our way into the fleet of transfers playing below us. We were working toward the Missouri shore, whence the wind came, to pass close to leeward of the Grand Chain. There were steamboats all about us. Suddenly, taking us entirely unawares, came a snow squall, and in an instant the snow was flying thick as a fog about us, the wind, which had shifted instantly, was driving us toward the Grand Chain at a high speed, and the *Easy Way,* surrounded by unseen steamboats, was in the greatest peril it had yet experienced. I was on deck, barefoot. There was no time to put on shoes and stockings. I ran to lower the current boards, to check our drifting with the wind, and then with the sculling oar turned the boat head to the wind and sculled my hardest. The steamboats were all whistling and feeling their way. We caught a glimpse of one close at hand, then of an-

other. The snow piled up on the after deck and covered my feet, but I was working so fast I did not notice it. Straining and tugging, we were still borne toward the wreckage, until we heard the roar of water over rocks, and were swept by the Grand Chain within a biscuit toss of it. Then the snow stopped as quickly as it had come, and the wind went down. The sun shone, and the *Easy Way* went without difficulty past the head of Power's island, kept on along a cutting bank in spite of another sudden squall, and came to rest at dusk in the shelter of a towhead at New Philadelphia.

That was a Sunday evening. The night was cold and clear. We were moored to a sharp bank, behind a cutting towhead, with flat lands extending for miles on both sides of the river, and with low hills barely discernible by daylight to the north. Those hills, that narrow passage, were the gates of summer. Winter raged in vain. He had made his last bid for us and had lost us. We had escaped his grasp. On Monday we drifted with but an average amount of work

around a bend below the town, back to the north and around Greenleaf Bend, and to an anchorage behind a bar below there; and on Tuesday we moored the *Easy Way* close to an engineer's camp some miles below, and walked through the woods and over the levee to Cairo. As we came into town along the narrow, raised sidewalk, roses peeped out at us between fence palings. Violets bloomed in many yards and scented the air sweetly. Climbing vines flowered the houses. It was stepping suddenly, without expectation, into spring again. A warm, balmy southwind blew gently upon us. We walked slowly, breathing this new life in deep contentment. It meant much to us. We had escaped from winter, and had arrived south. We were at Mason and Dixon's line. These Negroes, sunning themselves along the levee, were southern Negroes, — plantation darkies. These trains of cars, standing above the landing, were trains for the Southland; local trains, to be ferried across the water and run into Kentucky and Missouri. There were Jim Crow cars on the trains. Curious opposition of signs

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by which we knew the South — by its roses and violets and by its darkies. Yet they were all there, and we had arrived.

We went back to the *Easy Way* and found a tramp standing beside it. As he told his tale it suddenly struck us as funny, the predicament he was in. He had walked south in Illinois. He had come to the end. Now there was nowhere else to walk. A river shut him off on both sides. He could not swim across. He had no money to pay his way on a boat. He was, undeniably, in a remarkable predicament. The river was an impassible ocean to him. So I took mercy on him and bade him be on hand in the morning. It was a chilly night, and in the morning, at five o'clock, he had a fire on the bank and was gradually thawing himself out. Never in my life have I seen a man look colder than this poor-spirited, thinly clad tramp after a night in the river-fog on the Cairo shore. As for Janet, she was going through a revolution in spirit. She had accepted Annie — in Annie's boat. She had found the Sturgeon King a source of amusement and information. The woman in

Bainbridge's creek had aroused a deep sympathy in her. But she still retained urban or suburban standards. Her pride was stirred to the depths and her faith in her husband almost wrecked at the spectacle of this useless, inefficient and extremely dirty tramp being invited to come aboard her boat, and, worst of all, to eat with the family.

"What would mama say?" must have been the most persistent question in her mind; and she determined — so she confesses now — that the family should never hear of it. I was none too certain on the subject myself, for he was a villainous-looking fellow. Yet some instinct, perhaps for adventure, prompted me to invite him to eat with us, although a handout seemed more appropriate. He had scarcely stepped aboard than his at once apparent cowardice and fright began to interest us, and even Janet was soon laughing in her sleeve at him.

He was afraid to walk along our deck. On the narrow guard over which Janet danced a dozen times a day without thought of accident, he clung tremblingly to the roof and

begged me to go to the other side and balance the boat. Soap and water, to which he was invited before breakfast, found him still more timid; but compulsion was on him. He washed. And then, initiated to hot cornmeal mush, home-made bread and coffee, he ate timidly, as far from us as he could get at the table.

By the time we had finished breakfast we were in the bend at Bird point, on the Missouri shore. I swung the boat to land; eagerly but cautiously he clambered off, doffed his hat and stammered out his gratitude. Janet, if my memory serves, vented her feeling by scrubbing the table where he had eaten. For myself I was extremely glad to see the last of him; not alone because of my lady's partially-suppressed horror. A few minutes later we swung in toward the Kentucky shore, its low banks yellow with sycamore leaves. Janet suddenly burst into merry laughter at the thought of this coming to her ancestral state, into which her forbears had trudged with Boone to rise to high offices and to command its troops in two wars — and into which she

came now in a shanty-boat, with a tramp as a breakfast guest, and her husband working barefoot and bareheaded on deck, to the Kentucky eye as much a river rat as the worst of them. Under the magic influence of Kentucky the tramp sank back into oblivion; we landed for the mere pleasure of it several times, and roamed about under the yellow sycamores and along country roads to drink it in. Migrating tanagers made the day memorable.

It was a delightful day; and many more followed it, while we drifted past Columbus and Hickman, past an eddy at the Chalk Cliffs against which we had been warned; past sycamore woods and the mouths of bayous, and at last running late one stilly, wonderful evening — while ducks and geese quacked noisily from the bars, and owls hooted from the wildernesses back of them — down the long reach past Donaldson's Point and the towhead that marks the site of Island Number Ten, and under the frowning bluffs from which the Fighting Bishop made his brave stand against the Union fleet.

At every turn adventure awaited us. We moored that night at La Farge's landing and in the morning, wind driven, blew ashore near the mouth of the bayou St. John, in the shelter of the chute behind Morrison's island. A sign on the bank forbade our tying up, but we had no option. As I drove my stakes a young man came hastily down the bank and hailed us. He proved to be a pleasant chap and I invited him in. When we had visited for an hour or so he told us that this was his land, that he had prepared the signs. "But I don't want you-all to pay no attention to them at all," he said, heartily. "Fact is, I like you-all. I want you-all to come up to the house and visit us for a week or so."

We did not do that, but we had many merry days visiting back and forth between the *Easy Way* and the old plantation house back of Morrison's island, before we were able to start on our way downstream. For five days the wind blew hard, and most of that time the rain fell. There was heavy rain in the Ohio. The river, which had been dropping slowly, as slowly ceased to drop, turned sluggishly and began

to rise — an inch the first day, six inches the next, a foot the next and then two feet a day, steadily higher.

We were in a " feud country " now. Three states come together at this point. We had passed the lower line of Kentucky when we passed below Island Number Nine — no longer an island but a part of the Kentucky shore. We had then Tennessee on our left and Missouri on the right. But when we passed around the towhead of Number Ten and swept north to La Farges's with Missouri still on our right, we had passed again north of the Kentucky boundary. There is, therefore, opposite the town of New Madrid, which lies beside the bayou St. John, a little thumb-cap of land on the tip of a point belonging to the state of Kentucky. It is about two miles across and five miles long. It has no town, no village, — only cotton fields, woods and very few houses. On the back of it is Tennessee, across the river on every side Missouri. To aid those evil doers to escape whom even the three states may want, there are the fastnesses of the bayou St. John and the bayou James, the intricate woodland chan-

nels of the Scatters of Reelfoot or, within easy reach, the mysteries of Little and Castor rivers, and the Dornocks of the St. Francis.

Little wonder, then, that when a feud broke out between the families of Darnell and Watson on one side, and those of the Lanes and the Edwardses on the other, that there followed a period of bloody fighting and the assemblage of many unlawful characters. Mark Twain, blessed be his memory, has embalmed the thing in "Huckleberry Finn" in the feud of the Grangerfords and the Shephardsons, and this bayou St. John was perhaps the very stream in which Huck's raft was hidden while he was visiting "Bub" and his folks; but the story there told with all its horror does not even shadow the reality. There is no officer of the law on Kentucky point. It is forty miles by river to the sheriff. It is almost as safe to break the law in Tennessee; and New Madrid, across the river, was for generations known as the "toughest" town on the Mississippi. There had always been counterfeiters, thieves, cut-throats hiding in the swamps. When the feud broke out their numbers in-

"Bum Collier's Boy"
He had no other name, but he might have been Huck Finn

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creased, and as the families lost fighting strength and gradually deteriorated they began enlisting these ruffians until each man carried a large body-guard like a general with an attending army, wherever he went.

There were many battles — some of which Tom, our new friend, told us of as he sat on the deck or in the cabin of the *Easy Way*. Some, doubtless, he produced from fancy. Others we have since confirmed. True or not, his tales were thrilling masterpieces; and the climax to them all came when at the end of an account of butchery Tom capped it all by declaring that " Fo' my part I don't believe any man is got a right to shoot any other man when his wife is present."

My wife being ever present I dared to guy Tom at will — a guying he took merrily enough; but his hand was never far from a huge, blue-barrelled pistol when he was passing through his wooded land. Life was a solemn, hard thing for him, while it was merry, too. He gave us much good advice about the river and promised to come up to Chicago some day and show us the town as we did not know it.

But he never came. Within a week after we had unmoored the *Easy Way* and drifted out of his life poor Tom was dead — found dead in his beloved woods.

We left New Madrid on a rising river. It was a clear, still, sunshiny day; but for the first few miles we had little time to enjoy it. When the Mississippi river begins to rise the rats and mice along the bank take to shanty-boat life. As we had had a gang plank out, to say nothing of neglecting to put tomato cans on our mooring lines, we had acquired more than our due share of mice. As we drifted by New Madrid — through L'Ainse la Graise (Grease Bend) of the old days — we had all our furniture piled upon the bed except, of course, the stove; and we were busy chasing mice. Up and down, back and forth we raced. Now we cornered half-a-dozen of them, now they all got away; but at last, one by one, two by two, I caught them in my hands and threw them overboard to swim ashore — something each and every one of them was still attending to when he drifted from our view. The last one of them swam back three times, and climbed

aboard but our persistent repulses wearied him. He mounted a chip that came his way, and, sitting bolt upright as long as we were in view, shivered and rattled his teeth in a prolonged effort to move our sluggish consciences.

The river was rising now. To a shanty-boater that means a great deal. It means that the danger of grounding on bars is gone; for each hour there is more water and in a day a fair rise will be enough to float a shanty where there was dry land yesterday. It means that the banks which when the river falls are wet and slippery are now dry and firm above the rising waterline. It means a sudden increase in the amount of floating logs, trees, boards and small drift. This is both welcome and unwelcome, but mostly the former, for real shanty-boaters, being in a lumber country, — as most of it is down here — will tie up near an eddy and catch the logs that drift in, make them into a raft and either float them to mill or sell them to a towboat. I have known two partners to clear one hundred dollars on a rise in that way. Every progressive shanty-man

carries chain dogs and other appliances for the purpose.

The drift helped us, too, for on many days when the wind hindered we caught the whole top of a tree or a big stump and were pulled steadily along, by our trusty friend Charles William Albright.

There is a wonderful fascination in a rising river. One drifts in a stream in which are islands, sandbars, horrid sandy points. When he sweeps along a cutting shore the top of the bank is away up there, forty feet above him. Then, silently, mysteriously, the islands begin to vanish — first the bars of mud and sand and the muddy point; then the sandy points. Then there are willow fringes sticking up out of the water all along the off-channel side, where before was a wide muddy waste. Then the high bank suddenly stoops; and so to us, from the deck of the *Easy Way,* as we neared Memphis, the bank came steadily down, until in many places we were no longer in a canyon but could look over the green spreading sward before the levees.

And all this time the rain fell, endlessly.

It began again the day after we had left New Madrid. Having us securely out in the wilderness it washed the hasty paint out of our canvas roof-cover and dripped through. First it dripped on the table; then on the trunk. Then a wet spot appeared in the "hall way." Then over the bed it began to show in the boarding and to run along in little streams, and drop down. I got out a table oil-cloth and spread it above the bed, hanging it from the roof carvels; and at night, waking, we could hear the rain drop on this from above, and — after it had run down the gutter of the oil-cloth — drip noisily into a kettle which I suspended over the foot of the bed to catch it. There seemed no relief from it. It drizzled steadily in, by day and by night. And with the rain the banks grew as soft as though the river were falling. We were between the St. Frances and the Scatters of Reelfoot now. We came to Reelfoot, landing at "Ringtail," as we absent-mindedly called it, on an uncanny, strange night, and climbed ashore along the perilous gunwale of an empty barge waiting for a treasure of hardwood boards to be slid down a chute into its

cavernous interior. We crawled up the chute on hands and knees, and had a fine time of it, and quite lost sight of our real errand, which was to find a trader and a box of baking powder.

Other things were coming down on the flood, too. We caught a pumpkin, and some fine winter squashes, as hard and cold in the river water as though out of an ice box. Others were in the same pursuit. It is a favorite source of supply with shanty-boaters. And as the rain still continued there came a day, when we had passed through the beautiful chute of Island Eighteen, and had weathered a gale in its snug harbor, and had felt our way through the difficult Cottonwood Point region and over the crossing above Island Twenty-one in a dense fog — there came a time when with rain in the boat, and swampy banks, and winter apparently coming on us, that we were ready to sell our boat and give up our trip.

It was a time of bleakness and discouragement for us. The leaking roof made the cabin uncomfortable; the stormy weather, the wet

banks, the monotony of the featureless shores wore upon us. But worst of all our newspaper work had been slighted under continual prodding from our public commission. Congress would adjourn soon, the memorial must be prepared, there was no time to stop for material or to write and mail stories. At New Madrid we had written two fiction stories and sent them to *McClure's,* but we had slight hopes of getting them accepted. And now as we came into the most desolate reach of the entire river, with the St. Francis swamp on one side, the Reelfoot swamp on the other, the blues set in strongly and we counted up daily the chances of selling the boat and going back home. Yet we were ashamed of this idea. We hated to think of giving up.

At Huffman, Arkansas, almost on the Missouri line, the climax came. There was a river man there with several boats and buying more. He wanted to buy ours. He came aboard in a heavy rain and found everything wet inside, and it was too much for him. He offered thirty dollars, and we asked one hundred. We would have sold for fifty in our state of mind

at that time, but he would not raise. So he went ashore, and we set out again, the rain still raining, around a great desolate sandbar in a Tennessee bend. Suddenly the rain ceased, the clouds parted, and all afternoon the sun shone; and in a complete revulsion we cheered up and never went down into the depths so deep again during the journey.

We came into Barfield one night about this time. It was a Saturday night. The rain was falling in sheets. The bank was still pretty high and so steep and soggy that I dared not try to climb up it to get to the shore. We dropped in below a big Crescent barge which lay at the bank getting lumber, and I struggled up the slippery board chute to shore. The ground was so wet that I frequently went over shoe-top deep in it, once or twice almost knee deep. Barfield even now is no metropolis. In those days it was the jumping-off place — a little landing with a few disconsolate houses, each marked near the eaves with a streak of mud to show how high the last flood rose; a store and a saloon. I went to the store. Half a dozen men were sitting around, and eyed me

Barfield, an Arkansas landing. Note the flood line next the eaves

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curiously. I bought what we wanted and went out.

Curious things happen. Three or four years later I stood on the levee at Cape Girardeau, Missouri, taking pictures of the river, when a stranger accosted me — a well-dressed gentleman.

"Pardon me, suh," he said, "but we have met befo', though you doubtless do not recall it. It was a few years ago, at Bahfield. I was a-settin' in the sto' one evenin' when you came and bought six eggs, a cake of Sapolio and a pound of rice. Wheh you com f'om on such a night none present knowed. Wheh you went to we did n't know. And, suh, we had an evenin' of right sharp discussion oveh you, suh, as to what a gentleman comin' f'om nowheh, and havin' as fah as we knew no home and no abidin' place could be doin' on such a night with six eggs, a bah of Sapolio and a pound of rice."

But it was always that way on the river. Everyone seemed to take notice of us and remember us; and generally we took notice the same way. We seemed to strike them as "dif-

ferent." On the day we left Barfield, a nasty, cold morning with a little snow, when we had run for shelter behind Forkéd Deer island and into the old mouth of Forkéd Deer river, and had wandered over a few miles of muddy farmland, between negro cabins, windowless and apparently deserted except for the strains of guitar or mandolin coming through the cracks — ghost sounds maybe — to a house full of measles, with a milky cow — in that day alone we made a lifelong impression on half a hundred people for our amazing stupidity and recklessness in wandering bareheaded and apparently merry, through that dragging, sticky, wet clay they called a road, through that pouring rain, risking a "death-o'-cold" for the sake of a pail of milk and a chance to catch the measles. The people who lived there would n't do it; we would. There was always some difference like that which made each side remarkable to the other.

Plum point was yet ahead of us — Plum point which used to be feared by river steamboat men. It is one of the two great shoals of the lower river, a region extending between

fifty and one hundred miles. Swept down by the engineers' town of New Haven, and across to Plum point itself, we found ourselves suddenly in the dark, missed the channel after passing the point, and fetched up on the back of Yankee bar.

Nights on sandbars were familiar enough before we got to New Orleans; but that was the first. The sand shoaled so gradually we could not get within fifty feet of shore, so I waded in, drove my stakes, made a line fast to them, and so moored the *Easy Way* (one of the places where an anchor would have saved trouble). Every hour in the night I took in slack as the river rose, and in the morning we were right over the stakes, which I recovered from the deck. We went on through the chute of the bar and passed the splendid Chickasaw bluffs.

The river is narrow and very deep at their feet, and eddies tremendously. We went through whirling. Next day we went through Fogleman chute, and then into Beef Island chute where the shore was roaring into the water acres at a time, throwing trees and all

into the flood. So rounding the bend at Mound City, we came at noon in sight of Memphis, sitting wonderfully on her hill; and at one o'clock moored our house against the willows beside the Great Eddy, in the upper end of Shanty-boat Town.

Memphis

CHAPTER IX

IN THE GREAT EDDY

The Great Eddy at Memphis, in which we were to spend an adventurous ten days, is a highwater phenomenon covering a sandbar lying along the shore from the city to Wolf river. As the river rises over the bar shanty-boats coming in float over it and moor themselves to the higher ground, fringed with willows, that becomes the new shore. When that in turn is flooded they move down to the city levee, or up Wolf river for better shelter. As we came in the whole front of the willows was lined with the boats.

As we made our house snug for our first trip to the city, half an hour after our arrival, an incoming shanty slowly drifted by our stern. It was a most dilapidated craft, top-heavy, paper roofed, patched, unpainted, altogether looking like the last resort of a homeless wanderer.

On its deck two men clung to the roof to avoid falling overboard. As they saw us each freed one hand and waved us a cheerful greeting while their boat rocked perilously. We stared at them in amazement, unmixed with pleasure. They were our old acquaintances of the canal, whom we had dodged in the fog at Grafton — the two Frenches themselves, overtaking us at last.

They came ashore abreast of us as we walked along, and explained that in trading their skiff for a shanty-boat at Grafton they had thought they were getting the best of the bargain. Instead they had found themselves in possession of a leaky, almost useless boat which they had with difficulty kept afloat this far. They were only going as far as White river and, they assured us, it was nice we had come together at last as we could all use our boat the rest of the way.

As we walked the length of Shanty-boat Town toward Memphis and the postoffice, we closely studied the motley collection of shanty-boats assembled. And they studied us, openly and stupidly. Among them were many to be

classified on sight: store-boats, traveling photographers, medicine-men, and fishers. The rest, as we later determined, were mostly junk collectors or junk thieves, and a few were, like ourselves, traveling for pleasure or to see the river. Janet added to her collection another educational experience. We had no difficulty in discovering as we passed the groups that they were passing comments upon our airs and our manners in the very moment we were dissecting theirs. It had never occurred to my lady that the shanty-boaters might disapprove of her as she had of them; and having tried their life, endured their hardships, eaten with the dirtiest of them and been classified with them by the shore-dwellers, it was a hard jolt to be criticized as an alien among them.

That was the day before Thanksgiving. We walked up to the postoffice and found a check waiting for us, and laid in supplies for the big dinner; not a turkey, for the second-hand stove would not cook one, but a juicy porterhouse, some real sugary yams and many additional fixings, including some real New Orleans molasses as sweet and delicate as maple syrup.

We strolled about sight-seeing; fed the squirrels in the park, and then went back up the sandbar to our house. A seedy-looking swindler came out that night and showed us a badge representing that he was harbor-master, and demanded fifty cents for the privilege of mooring against the willows. He had no legal right to the money. We were not in Memphis, and certainly not at the levee for the maintenance of which a tax is collected. But as the neighbors all paid it, we beat him down to a quarter and settled. A day or two later the river was so high that the woods were flooded and most of the boats moved down to the levee. Preferring quiet, however, we hid the *Easy Way* among the trees to be out of the dangerous crush of drifting logs that whirled about in the swift eddy, and bought a skiff from a neighbor to go to market in. (We had come this far, recklessly without a skiff; but the one we bought was soon known among our neighbors as Mathews' Coffin, so we were perhaps just as reckless to possess one.) The Frenches, unwilling to pay the levee tax, and not discovering our hiding-place, went on down the river.

Stranded until the "next year of big water," maybe ten years

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We started our Thanksgiving dinner early, putting the yams in to roast as soon as we were through breakfast. Next to us in the eddy was a store-boat manned by a lonesome young chap from Missouri, better dressed, better educated and of a better type than most of our neighbors. This was Clarence Jones — it was impossible to call him anything but Clarence. His greeting was so friendly and so courteous, and his situation so lonely that we struck up an acquaintance with him and invited him to share our Thanksgiving dinner — Janet this time taking the initiative. Clarence proved an inoffensive lad, traveling alone on a boat on which he had a cargo of canned goods. He had sold out most of the wares and was eating the remainder, trying to make up his mind whether to stay in Memphis, drift down the river, or go somewhere for a job. He seemed to take best to waiting.

Janet let the yams cook for hours in the slow oven of our delapidated stove, till the sugar melted and recrystallized inside their skins; and in the late afternoon, with a can of corn contributed by Clarence, turned into a pudding,

and with our steak rarely broiled and full of juice, we ate the most enjoyable Thanksgiving dinner of our memory. We gained much knowledge as we consumed it. Our comfortable companionship turned Clarence's mind to his own lonesome situation and he explained to us that he had not always been so.

"I ain't had nobody to cook for me for some time," he said, contemplatively. "Ain't it queer about some women? Now there was Mary — had a good home and a good man — I did n't beat her or nothing — had her own things, and plenty to eat, but she just could n't be satisfied. She always hankered to have a store of her own — on shore. She was fussy about millinery. Nothing to do but housekeeping, and yet forever thinking of nothing but hats. Nothing I could say did n't make no impression. She got me to give her a little money and she went ashore and set up a millinery shop for herself."

Janet listened so well that he continued to "reminisce."

"I done a lot for Mary, too. She was livin' in St. Louis, no work, nothing to do, winter

coming on, and crazy to travel. I liked her looks, so I let her bring her trunk aboard; she was pretty nigh a year traveling down the river with me."

He sighed heavily over his loss and we led him on to more talk about our neighbors. I asked him about Blake, the Chickasaw medicine man. His boat lay on the other side of Clarence's, and he was even then one of the best-known characters on the river. Blake travels in style now, in a sternwheel gasoliner. But in those days he drifted in a tight little cabin boat, with his "doctor" sign painted on the outer walls, and up and down the river he peddled the wonders of Chickasaw oil. Over beyond him was Thompson, a man from Indiana, traveling on his wedding journey and already a year out of port. Their baby was born in Memphis, and all Shanty-boat Town rejoiced with them. Thompson was trading brass jewelry to the Negroes and expected to reap a harvest when the cotton money came in. So did the man who came in next to him, and old graybeard from Jeffersonville, Indiana. This old chap and his wife ran a

regular department store in their boat. The boat itself was no small affair, being fully sixty feet long and twenty broad and stoutly built. In the store part there were rows of calicoes on the shelves, trinkets in the show cases, cigars and tobacco, groceries of many sorts, and several barrels of apples. There were more apples in the "cellar," for the old man had loaded the hold full in Indiana at one dollar and a half a barrel. He was selling apples at three for ten cents, large ones a nickel each (regular rates down there), so there was profit in the trade. He said the apples would pay for boat, stock and living, and leave the rest all profit. He had sold out, on the way down, his calicoes and most of the groceries, and was buying goods for the run to Vicksburg. Kuykendahl, one of the best-known and most popular store-boatmen on the river, came in next to him, and farther along were the Belle of Dixie, Belle of Arkansas, and two or three other traders, stocking up. Each had his own particular district that he was aiming at; each catered to a particular kind of trade. They departed on different days, and

A show-boat at a landing

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probably seldom came into competition. There was a dentist's chair on one of the boats, and one was fitted up with nickel-in-the-slot phonographs. And in among the others were many boats on whose roofs or decks were piled hoop-nets, seines and the other tools of the fishermen. These were mostly bound for White river, where the sturgeon fishing was said to be good, and where "shovel-billed cat" was being sold to the canneries to be transmuted by commercial alchemy into pink canned salmon from the Columbia.

There are many such communities as this on the river. Into them drift the riff-raff as well as the élite of Shanty-boat Town; and though many visit back and forth, the line of sociability is really drawn almost as straightly in them as among similar folks ashore. There were doubtless thieves among us at Memphis. If so they did not steal from us. There may have been many there who were wanted by the law in other regions. Certainly boats came and went on which, our neighbors said snifflingly, scandalous things took place. The river man is not rigid in his family relations.

He recognizes the firmness of the tie only while it exists. He is as kindly to his helpmeet as a man on shore. And since he makes his own bargains and obeys his own laws regarding matrimony, he has a great contempt and no fellowship for those others who, afloat as ashore, make their way by loose living and barter and sale beyond the holy bonds.

Clarence had worked for Espanto, the "Mexican Indian," and told us much about him — much that we were glad to know when at Lake Providence we came on the track of this wily individual, and at Vicksburg where we actually met him. But the chief point of interest which Clarence contributed was, after all, his own story.

"I have been on the river three years," he said. "The first year you don't like it very well, but you think it 's easy. The second year you have your doubts about how much the river could do to you if it tried. The third year you 're in love with it but you ain't got no doubt you 're afraid of the river every minute, sleepin' or waking." From what we heard in other camps this seems to be a general summary

Interior of show-boat

of the river psychology. We had a taste of this fear ourselves before we left Memphis.

The river rose steadily until the gauge on the waterfront marked twenty-six feet above low water. By this time the great eddy was probably three quarters of a mile long and a quarter of a mile broad. Out beyond it the river rushed by with a steadily increasing speed amounting to about six miles an hour. Departing from the main channel down near the levee the eddy swept with a slower motion up the willow side of the bar, turned and twisted, passed out by the mouth of Wolf river, went down the outer side again, and in some mysterious manner found itself again in the channel. But the great interior swirl was not always revolving so. The winds changed it, and without the winds it changed itself. Sometimes it suddenly reversed. Sometimes it split in two and went both ways, leaving either a quiet spot or a maelstrom in the center. Quantities of drift logs were coming downstream, with stumps, boards and timbers. When the wind blew toward the eddy or was entirely still these came into it and swept slowly up

and down it. If the wind was strong from south or west they made a menace for anything in the eddy and would have crushed us but for the trees behind which we were moored.

The shanty-boaters along the levee were constantly on the watch for good logs which the wind brought into this backwater. Logs which were branded with the name of the owner could be returned to the big mills up Wolf river — the largest hardwood mills in the world — for twenty-five cents each. Logs unbranded were worth their timber value which was often several times that. Many of the loggers had a habit of chopping the brand off with an axe, but others were more honest.

Every day huge rafts came down in tow of steamers, and were either impounded at Hen and Chickens or were swung into the eddy to check their way, and then pulled back up Wolf river to the mills. One morning, early in December, when a gale was blowing and the eddy had worked up quite a sea, the *Vernie Mac* came down with a tow of cottonwood and gum logs. The gums were in the majority and as they float deep they made the raft hard to

handle. The steamer swung it into the eddy and endeavored to check its way. The eddy was very deceptive. On this occasion it caught the raft and carried it down to the levee, then back up to Wolf river, the captain watching for a chance to drag it out. None offering on that round, he had to make another, and then another, each time getting near the center of the eddy.

By this time all Shanty-boat Town was on the alert watching for the catastrophe. Clarence, our neighbor in the willows, had called me and we were bundling my tub of hawser into his skiff. As the steamer went around for the fourth time it reached the center and at the same moment the eddy, with a convulsive roar, reversed and split.

Such a chaos of logs I have never seen before or since. They shot up endways, singly and by the dozen. They fell over each other, and over the steamer. The captain of the *Vernie Mac* was glad enough to get his boat out whole. Then Shanty-boat Town, deliriously happy, made a simultaneous rush. Clarence and I in our skiffs were off with the first.

In a moment along came a big section with a couple of dozen gum logs in it still bound together. We boarded it and rode down the eddy, around the foot and up again, watching for our chance. It came at last. While Clarence made one end of the line fast to a binder I shot for the willows in my skiff with the free end and snubbed it to the nearest tree that seemed large enough to hold.

I was none too soon. The eddy was swift and the line came taut as I worked. It fouled an oarlock, and in the twinkling of an eye my skiff was whirled bottom up. I went into the icy water, but by great good fortune managed to catch my arms over some of the drift without going quite all under. There were stumps, logs, timbers and all manner of drift grinding around together in that whirlpool, and I did not at first see any very hopeful way out; but by pulling myself over a log, and past a stump, and so gripping one piece after another as we floated up the eddy, I managed to come within a few feet of the stern of the *Easy Way*.

White of face but quick of wit Janet stood

In the Willows, Memphis

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on the after deck with a coil of light line. This she threw with good aim across the stump to which I clung, and in a moment I was hauled in, none the worse for the wetting, and ready to join Clarence in the rescue of my skiff. We had caught the piece of raft. It almost pulled the tree loose, but the line held and the logs came to rest against the willows where we moored them and went out after more. In an incredibly short space of time that eddy was cleared of sellable drift. Our share of it netted Clarence and I each ten dollars when the logs were turned over to their owner next day; and Janet and I added that much to the earnings of our wedding journey.

CHAPTER X

GOOD TRAVELING DAYS

From Memphis to Arkansas City is two hundred and ten miles measured in midstream, probably two hundred and forty as the channel winds. We made it in a week to the minute, better than thirty miles of traveling to the day, a week of as beautiful weather and as happy days as we knew on the whole river.

It was on Tuesday, December eleventh, that we left Memphis. The river was falling and was at twenty-one feet. Clarence nearly grounded in the willows that day, staying in an hour too long, and we had to chop down two or three trees to get his boat out. On Tuesday morning he and I in our skiffs towed his "shanty" up above the mouth of Wolf river to a snug landing among the log rafts moored at Hen and Chickens, where he intended to work. And then at two in the

afternoon, as soon as we had finished dinner, my wife climbed to the roof of the *Easy Way,* I cast off the lines which held us to the outer fringe of trees, and the eddy bore us slowly upward and outward. We were about to try an experiment. During our stay at the willows I had borrowed a brace and bit from Clarence and mounted a pair of oarlocks on the corners of the forward deck. From Chicago to Memphis I had managed the *Easy Way* with a sculling oar at the stern. Now I stood on the deck with my two long sweeps in hand. As we came to the head of the eddy I dipped them in. With wonderful ease I felt the house boat swing out from the eddy into the main current, and a moment later we were again rushing downstream toward the city, while from the shantyboats along the bank a dozen hands waved us good luck. The river had lost its highwater swiftness but still had a strong current. We went under the railroad bridge without difficulty — the last bridge on the river — took Tennessee chute down the left side of President's island, and saw the Bluff City fade away in the distance astern. There was no wind. I

took in the sweeps and left the *Easy Way* to find her own channel, and climbing to the roof sat down beside Janet. Our wedding journey had begun again. This was no winter but as balmy and delicious an Indian summer as we had ever known. It was as soft as a spring day. It seemed as though on yonder bank flowers must be springing up. We had lost our dread of cold weather and of running ice, and were ready to enjoy the travel to the full.

Wednesday was as fine as Tuesday, and Thursday followed in the same mood. We were away before sun-rise that day, and down Commerce cut-off before the mists had entirely cleared from the river. We had a skiff with us now — the one we had bought at Memphis. It bobbed and bumped against the hull and was a great nuisance when there was any breeze, having a tendency to get under the guard and pound there till it jarred the whole cabin. But it was a comfort to have it just the same. It proved its use that Thursday, when, finding that we were needing oil, I took the can in the skiff as we made the crossing at M'Hoon's landing, and leaving my wife and the *Easy*

Way to drift, shot ahead to the nearest store, made my purchase and pursued and caught my run-away home and wife again. We passed Ship island that day, where Mark Twain's brother was lost, but which now was remarkable chiefly for an enormous flock of ducks which, when they flew, seemed like a cloud overhead, but when they turned and wheeled, showed a myriad of silvery tips — perhaps the silvery lining of the cloud. We passed Shoo Fly bar, where the river was miles broad, and met the sidewheel steamer *James Lee* away out in the middle, so far from shore we seemed to be in a great lake. Over on the Arkansas side the bank was caving, a forest covered bank. The crash of the falling trees came to us at first like distant thunder and we looked anxiously for the clouds. None were in sight, and when the noise was repeated we were able to place it. Then in a little while as we came down toward "Old Bayou landing," we could see the majestic cottonwoods one by one swaying, waving their branches in frantic effort to regain their balance, and toppling with mighty roar into the destroying current. It was im-

pressive, awe-inspiring. Night was swiftly coming on and we had not yet a camp in sight. We did not dare go near such a bank, and the other shore was a sandbar which with a falling river was impossible. But our chart showed a tiny bayou which might hold our boat. We came in as close to the bank as we dared, passed the region of caving, swept in the dusk along a shore now so nearly hidden that we could not see the snags or eddies, but only hear the swirl of the impeded water. At last, dimly I made out a gap in the bank, and catching the sweeps swung the *Easy Way* out of the current into an eddy. Up with it we ran till at its head we came to a tiny creek. It was our bayou, and into it the *Easy Way* fitted as if they had been made for each other. There were twelve feet of water under us that night, and trees and vines pressed against our cabin from both sides. Four feet away, separated from us by so narrow a tongue of sharply cut bank, was the river current, or the tiny fringe of eddies that there bordered it. Steamers went by at night, and their waves beat against this little wall, but no

tremor shook the *Easy Way*, no ripple crossed the eddy below us to rock our house boat.

"Away at daybreak," — how often that record appears upon our log. It was another of those ideal days. We waited for nothing, but as soon as we were awake, I moved the *Easy Way* out of her hiding-place into the current and left her to drift while we dressed and breakfasted. We went past the mouth of the St. Francis river while we sat at table, and had a glimpse of a score of fishing boats just within it. Not a breath of wind disturbed us. We had nothing to do but sit on deck and read and talk to one another as our boat progressed, till at ten o'clock we came in sight of Helena. This is the only bluff town below Commerce, Missouri, on that side of the river, and even here the bluff is so far back from the river that it appears like a town in the bottomlands.

That dreamy afternoon we let the house boat float as it would down a broad, delightful reach and "went rowing" in the skiff. For the first time we had an opportunity of viewing the *Easy Way* from a distance as it

drifted, and imagining how we must look to those we passed.

The sun had set and night was falling as we made the last crossing to Old Town landing, Arkansas. Old Town bayou was dry, but on the bank beside it was pitched a tent, and in the eddy below it was a large-sized house boat. We pulled in above the foot of the crossing and put our lines on some half-submerged willows. As the *Easy Way* came to rest, out of the tent came marching a bulky figure, a bearded fat man, brandishing aloft a coffee pot, and singing in a voice as huge as himself:

> "Ya, ya, dis is de Garten of Eden
> Mitout any Eve."

There was neither music nor rhythm to it, but it was evidently the outbursting of his native happiness. Janet and I — we who had so unwittingly introduced an Eve into the Garden — could not restrain our mirth. The old fellow heard us and stopped. In a moment we had exchanged greeting. He, too, was from Chicago — an old friend of the

Chute of Number 18 — one of our mooring places

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Sturgeon King. In his tent on the bank he was as free and as happy as the original Teuton in the German wilds, while his helper, less fond of wild life, lived all alone in the shanty-boat. The old man had built his camp fire and was about to cook his supper. He had sturgeon, corn bread and coffee. What more could he want? And as for adventure, he had that in plenty, as we saw by a glance at two huge fish-skins hanging over a pole near him. They were alligator gars, the largest we had ever seen.

No fish in southern waters, I think, is more dangerous in an encounter than this armored cruiser of the warm bayous. With scales which will turn a hatchet like so much polished iron-wood, and with jaws which would do credit to an alligator, equipped with long sharp teeth, he is a nasty customer to tackle at any time. "Our friend's friend," as we soon jokingly designated this acquaintance of the Sturgeon King, had had more than an ordinary struggle with these two.

He had come to Old Town landing a week before, and casting around for a good place

to trap sturgeon, had chanced upon Old Town lake, which lies a little way back in the bottom woods, and is a stretch of cut-off river, deep, full of cypress trees, and a haven for alligators and other such creatures. The sturgeon fisherman, seeking good eggs for the caviar market, set his gill nets in the lake by way of trial to see how the fish were running, before trying more complex apparatus. Next morning he went out alone in a skiff to under-run them. To his amazement they were drawn under water, and he had difficulty in getting hold of one of the lines. When he had done so, and had begun to haul in, he was even more surprised at the sudden rush with which the nets came toward him.

The rush was quickly explained when up out of the water beside his skiff bobbed the long jaws of two huge alligator gars. Snapping and slashing about, they were tearing the nets in which they were entangled, and they were threatening by their struggles to overturn the skiff in which he sat. It was a moment of extreme peril. Unfortunately he had come out without a gun or pistol. A Negro helper was

on the shore of the lake with a rifle, and to him he called for help. Then, with the only weapon at hand, a hatchet, he attacked the gars. Followed such a mêlée as one would not see twice in a lifetime, — a mix-up of floundering monsters, rocking boat, heavy Teuton, and entangling nets. The Negro was coming as fast as he could drive his skiff, but he came too late to help, for the fisherman had succeeded in finding a vulnerable spot in each gar's head, and had driven the hatchet deep into them. They sank from sight, but were still entangled in the net, and he was able to haul them to shore and so secure them. They were indeed monsters, as we saw when the skins were stretched before us. One measured a trifle over six feet in length, the other almost eight. They were old veterans of the bayou.

The old fisherman explained to us that white folks did not eat gar-fish, but that the Negroes considered them as delicate as pork and were eager to get them. We were glad to hear this, for it took a load from our minds. Attached to it is a joke on us which we have

never told even our dearest enemies — but this is as good a place as any to let it out.

As a matter of course, when we started down the river, we were well equipped with setlines, handlines and fish-hooks, and expected to have fresh fish whenever we wanted it — though we are neither of us overfond of it. As we were not familiar with river fishing we took pains to acquire from others plenty of information about bait, about placing the setlines, and about the favorite haunts of catfish and other denizens of the Mississippi.

We made dough-balls by the hundred, and sat long, pleasant hours on the deck of the drifting *Easy Way* trailing them in the water to edify the carp, buffalo and catfish, which we wished to corral. Now and then we saw fishermen on the bank of the Illinois whipping the stream and hauling in three-pound black bass which were a treat to the eye. From a fike-netter we bought — at ten cents each — silver perch weighing two or three pounds, — delicious fish. In the Old Canal, using potato bait, we even had the good for-

tune to catch carp, which were sweet and delicate. But after that our luck was nothing. I tore up rotten logs by the score for white grub worms, said to be an especial temptation to the catfish. My wife made dough-balls which were almost as good as doughnuts — or looked that way. Nightly, after mooring the house boat, I sought what seemed a proper spot, and set a nicely-baited trawl. We even wasted fresh meat and pork on it. But no fish came our way.

At last, however, having set the line close to the *Easy Way* in an eddy, I was startled, delighted, cheered, one morning by finding what appeared to be a whale resisting my attempts to haul it in. I called Janet, who came on deck. Carefully I pulled in the trawl, and at last lifted a strenuously kicking fish to the deck. Another followed, his very mate, and then a third, of a different style, not nearly so handsome, but larger. The third just touched the deck, got free and went away. The other two were ours.

Ensued a tussle. With my bowie knife I attacked them, but two tougher fish it had

never been my misfortune to meet. I think it must have taken me an hour to get their heads and hides off and their awful jaws back into the river. Then Janet took them and subjected them to the entendering influences of our kitchen stove. What she did I know not. I am sure it was orthodox, for at cookery she is expert. But it would have taken more than cookery to make those fishes tender and palatable. Heroically we ate them, for they were the first fruit of our setline. But we did not enjoy them so much as we did the joke which we conceived nature was playing on us. If these were catfish, deliver us! We let our setline lie in idleness thereafter. But now as we stood on the bank at Old Town and gazed at the skins the Sturgeon Fisherman had caught, we knew the whole extent of the joke. For they were gars which we had caught — not alligator gars, but nice little hard-shell, sharp-tooth gars. We nudged each other and pointed out the familiar features of the big fellows. We did not tell the fisherman, but when he assured us that by some people the gars were considered deli-

cacies we were restored to our good esteem again.

Later, when we were nearly down to Natchez, we bought a catfish of a fisherman, and having it at home, recognized it as the counterpart of the one which had escaped the day we caught the gars. But we did not like catfish either and so were comforted.

We were not the only people who did not know everything about river fishing. As we lay in the eddy at Old Town a young man in a skiff rounded in under our stern and asked for news of the Davis boys, from the upper river. We were able to tell him that they had gone on ahead. He had several nets in his skiff, and some camping outfit, and had come from Iowa to overtake his friends. They were bound for White river, whither he was eager to start. He stayed for supper, however, as he was out of provisions.

"You petter stay hier py me," said our Teutonic friend to him. "I gives you work, yet."

"No, I 'm going to White river."

"Vite river? My poy, I peen dere. Dey

ees more fishermen as dey ees fish at White river."

"That 's all right," declared the self-confident Iowan. "I 'll show 'em a thing or two. I 've got something here that 'll wake 'em up."

"Hey? W'at you got?"

"Box nets, — that 's what I got."

"Pox nets, hey? Pox nets?" The old German stared in a sudden amazement. Then as the young fellow floated out into the current the old chap went into a paroxysm of merriment.

"Ach! Golly!" he cried when he could catch his breath. "He got pox nets. He show dem somedinks at the Vite river." He straightened up and pointed to a pile of crates on the bank.

"You see t'ose crates? I pring dem all down from Chicago wit' more as a t'ousand dollars vort' of seines. Dey is de best seines on de river. And I cut all dem up to make pox nets long ago."

He slapped his knees and sat down in simple inability to laugh enough. "Pox nets," he

spluttered. "Py golly! Ain't he a smart feller? He got pox nets. I pet he show dem old fishermen lots of dinks."

"Saturday, December fifteenth. Away at dawn; another fine day." This was that memorable day when, in spite of a falling river, we went down the shallow chute between Island Sixty-two and its towhead, and a little later, seeing the big sidewheeler *Kate Adams* coming over a crossing toward us, shot into the chute of Sixty-six, and found a current that did our hearts good. That chute was a real terror. A barrier of snags and stumps seemed almost to block the way. The shore of the island was a white sand-bank, horrid with broken timbers. The chute was crooked. But past all obstacles we tore at tremendous speed. Someone's cornfield had been going into the river as the water fell — in fact a good many cornfields had. So all along the line of eddies were to be seen the fragments from them. We captured an excellent big squash. We found the lower end of the chute more pleasant, but when we had come into the river again, at sunset, there was a

long, straight stretch of broad channel, which made us wish we had stayed in the narrow stream for a camping place. We ran down the Arkansas side, and found a high, terraced bank overgrown with grass and willows, which proved an excellent mooring as long as the wind held slack. And as it did hold slack until we got away in a dense fog at ten o'clock next morning, we had nothing to bother us.

We had been very fortunate, so far, in avoiding the "levee" camps along the river. Work on the enormous earthen dams which restrain the flood waters is continually going on. At intervals along the way are camps where Negro laborers are housed in tents. To these camps commonly drift the ugliest and most criminal of their race — graduates from the convict camps being numerous in them. Gambling and drinking and quarreling pass away the idle hours, and murders are common occurrences. We had an experience this Sunday morning which amazed us and showed us what they might be like; for the fog held us to the Arkansas bank which did not happen

to be the channel side, and we went down behind a towhead, and from the bank the Negro men and women reviled us, shouted curses and taunts and threats and unprintable things at us, and gave us very good reason to be glad that we were afloat on our own boat and quickly to be hidden in the fog.

Chutes, chutes, chutes — we went down two this day again, running the short cut behind Island Sixty-nine, and a little later another behind Seventy, and in the latter made our camp. Next day we ran the chute of Scrub Grass towhead, — a crooked way, cutting off quite a piece of bend for us, but leaving us uncertain till the last minute whether there would be water enough for us all the way through. That day we passed, almost without seeing them, the double mouth through which the White and the mighty Arkansas, united, flow into the Mississippi, — the upper in the forenoon, the lower in the afternoon; and in between I left my wife to drift recklessly away in the little house while I paddled to shore and ran a mile or more back inland

to the depot at Rosedale to mail an important letter, and then back to the landing and after her in swift pursuit.

We had made nearly forty miles that day when we rounded Caulk's point, and, drifting down the off-channel side, sought a mooring. The ground against which we ran looked firm enough, and we had had no previous experience with mud banks from which the river has just dropped away. I caught up stake, axe and mooring line and leaped — ashore? Oh, no. Down! I was almost waist deep in the slimy mud when I caught the edge of the deck, and with Janet's help extricated myself. We went farther downstream and fared better.

Next day we came to Arkansas City; but before we had quite arrived there we heard the final word of the Frenches. From the bank above the last bend a stranger hailed us.

"Hey, Jim! Jim!" he shouted as we drifted by.

"Whom do you want?" I asked.

"I want Jim French. Ain't that his boat?"

"No. He left Memphis a week ahead of us."

The ark and the arkitect

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"Sure he ain't on board?"

"Plumb sure."

"Wal, — I d' know. Jim said he was comin' down on that there boat. Told me so hisself up on the Illinois. I d' know why he ain't with you-all." And he shook his head suspiciously as if we had made away with James, or were concealing him for purposes of ransom. Janet and I grinned at each other in ghoulish glee at this confirmation of our conjectures regarding the persistent brothers.

Half an hour later — a week to the hour since we had left the willows at Memphis — I drove an oar deep into a mud-flat some distance out from the levee at Arkansas City, moored our house boat to it, and we went ashore in the skiff for mail and exploration.

Several years afterward, when I happened to be a witness in a federal court, the lawyer who cross-examined me endeavored to test my knowledge of the Mississippi, and began with Arkansas City.

"Do you know where it is?" he demanded, with quivering finger.

I did.

"Well — tell us what it is like!" he snapped.

I told him. Not a detail of the picture did I omit, — the scene, that is, as we first looked upon it. Mud, jews, niggers and hogs — there was nothing else. There, behind the levee, lay the very worst, muddiest imitation of a town we had ever seen. A number of stores and houses — ramshackle wooden affairs set upon posts — sheltered droves of hogs which rooted in the mud. There were hogs in the mud-lanes that served for streets. Niggers sunned themselves on the store galleries, while Israelites, of that hateful type which prevails in the dark land, smiled greasily upon them and solicited trade. There was a postoffice in a store. We went to it and found some mail, and walked gingerly over a piece of plank walk to a wood back of town where there were palmettoes — the first we had seen — peeping above the grass. We had sent some fiction stories to *McClure's* from New Madrid. And in our letter at this muddy place we found the answers. They were accepted — our first real acceptance. How little that edi-

tor chap back in New York knew what that message meant to us! We walked down the course of an old bayou and around through the beautiful woods. As we came back through town the darkies grinned at us like the good old southern darkies that they were. The Hebrews smiled ingratiatingly upon us as upon folks who had succeeded; and the very hogs seemed now but incarnate wealth! We walked along the levee and fell into converse with a Chicago man there. We went down to the shore, shoved off in our skiff, and were soon aboard the *Easy Way*. And then, from a government steamer, moored nearby, came a glad hail, and there was Billy L., the one man we knew south of the Ohio river.

No meeting could have been more remarkable than that. Billy had been a classmate of mine, as a freshman, ten years before this. I had not seen him since. He lived somewhere in Kentucky. When we started south, however, we often told inquisitive acquaintances that we were going south "to see Billy L.," and the fiction never failed to amuse us.

And here in Arkansas City we did meet

Billy. He was a civil engineer in government employ and, with Captain Walbridge on the *Patrol,* was inspecting guages for the last time before the winter. He found us a safe harbor for the *Easy Way,* and we lay there that night, after an evening of pleasure on the government steamer begun with a good dinner and ended with good yarns.

We were gone next morning, running hastily for "The Bends." But as we sailed away we remembered the glorious mud of Arkansas City, the prosperous hogs, the jolly Uncle Tom Negroes and the business-like Hebrews, and the old place took on a radiance which still enshrouds it and which covers its unlovely aspect as a magic veil.

CHAPTER XI

WE COME TO VICKSBURG

It would be a sorry trespass upon the patience of the reader were I to attempt to chronicle all the days that passed as we drifted down the Father of Waters. They are all there in my Logbook; an entry for each of them, detailing all that is necessary to recall to us the lightest incidents. But in this reach of the river from Arkansas City to Vicksburg there was at least one event that I cannot pass lightly by, — an event so horrible that it cast a shadow on more than two hundred miles of our journey and gave us a new knowledge of the perils through which we were almost unconsciously passing.

We left Arkansas City on a windy day and ran down to the first of the famous " Bends " of the river. Here, above Greenville, the great stream twists itself into a series of convolutions outdoing anything it has elsewhere at-

tained. We lay for three days stormbound at Georgetown bend, sharing anchorage with a red-bearded Swedish sailor who was making his way north to Chicago in a trim little sloop. Then towing around the bends behind a great ash tree, we weathered a gale on Bachelor's Bend towhead, opposite Greenville, and on the next day, the second before Christmas, ran down to Lakeport. It was there the distressing news reached us. I have spoken of the Thompsons, small traders, who had left Memphis ahead of us. They had come down this far, trading along the way, and just below, at Arcadia landing, had tied up for the holidays. They had had heavy bills at Memphis and Mr. Thompson was anxious for money-making trade, so he had tied up at a landing where a levee was being built and the Negroes were encamped. At once they crowded the boat and money began to flow into the till. It is an invariable custom on the river to shut off such trade and close the doors before dark. I have known traders traveling in partnership who never opened their doors to friend or foe after dark; and I have known others whose

custom it was for one to stay in the rear room, covering the front door with a rifle while his partner unbarred it, in order that they might have an advantage over any intruder. Yet, understanding the necessity of these precautions, Mr. Thompson left his doors open until after nightfall, in his desire to get the most of this opportunity.

There were several nickel-in-the-slot phonographs in the cabin. These interested the darkies immensely. Toward nine o'clock, when but two darkies remained on board, these called to Mr. Thompson that a phonograph was out of order. Foolishly, he put the pieces in his ears and bent over it. Instantly one drew Mr. Thompson's revolver from his hip pocket and shot him through the back of the head. Their motive was robbery, but they got very little. Returning later, they killed Mrs. Thompson, leaving the baby alive in the bed. The shanty-boat, with kerosene sprinkled about, and all aflame, was shoved out into the stream. The Thompson family had been blotted out.

Next day, with incredible swiftness, the truth came out. White men hastily sum-

moned from distant plantations, shanty-boatmen called ashore by a peremptory summons, made up an armed guard. Nineteen Negroes lined up before a grassy levee faced death. At another toll the volley would have rung out which would have wiped them all out. Suddenly one of them gave way and named the murderers. Quickly they were seized, quickly they confessed. In ten minutes their bullet-ridden bodies hung from a tree, the mob dispersed, and armed guards drove the sullen laborers about their work.

This was the news the *Belle of the Bends* brought us, and with it the word was passed to river folks to beware of the Mississippi shore; for two hundred miles, it was said, the blacks were sullen and ugly. We would do well to avoid them.

We had another sort of adventure at Lakeport ourselves, which taxed our pride. The long days of delay at the Bends had told heavily on our larder. For seventy-two hours the wind blew about us, often whirling the snow against our windows. In the cabin we worked industriously at our newspaper stories,

our commercial report — and in interims played games and read. But this did not extend the larder, and the food we had laid in at Arkansas City to last us to Lake Providence rapidly disappeared. Lake Providence was the nearest check, and we had not a sou in the cabin.

Landing at Lakeport on the morning before Christmas day, I set out to look for work, to earn a Christmas dinner. Vain search. The great plantation was idle for the holidays. In the office a mile from the landing the manager sat at his desk dealing out Christmas money and supply-orders to the Negroes. There was no work for anyone until the holidays were over.

Wandering back toward the landing, I encountered a handsome young chap of my own age galloping along on horseback. Him also I accosted and asked for a job. Nothing to be had. We talked for a few minutes, and I discovered to my joy that he was a Harvard man. I stated my case. He thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out a bill, and without hesitation passed it over.

"Borrow this," he said. I did borrow it, gladly, and sent it back to him from the next check we received. It bought our Christmas dinner at a store boat on the bank nearby, and carried us on to Lake Providence, where mail and money were awaiting us.

Under the shadow of the Thompson news we left Lakeport, intending to keep to the Arkansas shore for landing; but almost immediately below town we were caught by a strong offshore wind which, in combination with a crossing current, swept us to the Mississippi side. The wind was too strong for traveling, and we were driven into a big pocket eddy, — a scallop in the bank perhaps one hundred and fifty feet across, in which the current slowly revolved upstream. Such an eddy is often quiet for hours after the river outside begins to roughen with a heavy wind, and so we found this one. The bank was sloping and stable, about thirty feet high, of black alluvium throughout; and we moored on the upper side. In the late afternoon, the eddy growing rough, I pulled stakes and dragged the boat around to the lower side of

the same scallop, preparing to spend the night. Janet had come out on the deck, and I had stopped, stake and line in hand, to speak to her, when a light splash attracted our attention. A lump of dirt had fallen in.

Instantly we stood petrified. The whole bank, moored to which we had spent the day, was settling out of sight before our eyes. In absolute silence after that first splash, with scarcely a tremor, it split — nearly half an acre of it — loose from the mainland, and without tipping or breaking, settled majestically into the water. The channel at its face was seventy-five feet deep; into it that immense mass of earth disappeared, leaving not a ripple nor an eddy to mark its place. The whole force of the river swept down on our new mooring place. For a moment we were too frightened to move — and then, with my undriven stakes I jumped aboard, and, aided by a lull in the wind, after an hour of strenuous labor, succeeded in rowing the house across to the bar on the Arkansas side. It was a restless night. The river was falling. We might be hopelessly stranded before morning.

With the pancake-turner for a shovel, I buried a "dutchman" — a walnut log I was carrying for firewood — and moored the boat to it. Every hour of the night I got up and lifted the boat off the bank into the receding water. And at daylight on Christmas day we had just enough water riverward from us to scrape through into the open channel.

And so came Christmas day, — a day of loneliness, of worry, of hunger for home folks — and in the end of happiness, of delight, and of victory over the spirit that is memorable in the journey.

Mail stations were far apart down there, and mail was often missent or entirely lost. In one town the postmistress ate the entire contents of a box of candy, rewrapped it and delivered to us the empty box. With the irregular schedule and the bad service, Christmas messages could not possibly reach us. We had not a gift to give or to receive. The old river had given us a bad fright, and the Thompson affair was heavy on our nerves. Our finances were so low as to depress us, and poor Janet carried a big lump in her

throat as she prepared breakfast that morning.

We were coming into an unknown part of the river, through the Grand Eddy against which we had been warned, and then down into the head of Stack Island reach, which was another worry; and though we did not confess it then, the early morning found us, for perhaps the first time, wishing for our families for company.

Yet see how nature played a trick upon us. The day was magical. There was no wind. The sun was warm, the temperature like an ideal Indian summer day. We escaped from the bar, ran around a long bend and made a crossing. We consulted the chart. Amazing circumstance! We were in Mathews' bend. The place was made for us. A star in the channel showed that for the first time the bottom of the river was below the level of the Gulf of Mexico, — a sign that we were nearing the end. We came to Grand Eddy, Janet on the roof scanning for peril, I at the sweeps ready for action. Free from wind, the *Easy Way,* of her own accord, sought the

downstream current. On both sides of us, so that if I had dipped the sweeps they would have been in them, were two swift upstream swirls rushing past us, yet the downstream swirl on which we were held us safely in its keeping. Past it, entered on the broad, safe reach that leads past Leota landing and Grand lake, and so down into Louisiana bend, we brought our chairs to the roof and as a tramp friend expressed it, "just enjoyed."

Before the noontime we had another addition to our stock of Christmas pleasure. A big tree overhung the bank, half fallen, and covered with mistletoe. I brought the boat ashore and climbed the leaning trunk. It was a prize we got, — a mass of the most magnificent mistletoe we had ever possessed, a single stem whose branches, laden with berries, could not have been crowded into a bushel basket. I brought that into the cabin and put it to its best use, — hanging it later over the table, — and much refreshed in spirit, we ascended to the roof again and went adrift.

There was no goose upon the Christmas table — and a mighty simple meal it was. But

we ate it under the mistletoe, with the doors and windows open, with the water rippling lightly just within arm's reach through the sash, with the song of birds about us; we sat there a long time listening to the water's voice and watched the distant shores. Christmas had come to us and our hearts were full of it.

A man came down to the water's edge in Arkansas and shouted to the Mississippi shore.

"Ahoy! Hello! The other side!"

It was a musical hail, and for an hour he kept it up; but no one save echo and a dog replied. He hailed us and asked me to put him over, but it meant fully eight miles of rowing while my wife drifted helplessly on in the *Easy Way,* and I dared not risk it. We left him shouting over the wide river, and then, sitting on our roof, singing happily as on that day on the Illinois, with cobwebs again streaming from our roof, as on that other day, we came down into Louisiana bend, where for the first time Arkansas gave place to Louisiana on the right bank of the river. Louisiana! In that State was New Orleans. This was our Christmas gift, and we found it a welcome one.

As we came down into the foot of the bend and made swift progress through a chute toward the Mississippi shore again, it was early dusk. In the darkness under the distant bank a spark twinkled, and stopped. Soon we could dimly see a boy on the bank, toward which the current strongly pressed us — and a moment later flashed out a beacon which he had come to light. For hours we had not seen a house, nor heard a voice except that of a man hallooing. We were in a dense wilderness. But here with us, in it, was a boy and his signal, one of those faithful beacon tenders who nightly light the flames that make the Mississippi safe for commerce from its head to the sea. It seemed as if we were guests, now, for whom special thought had been taken. The little lantern gleaming out at us was for us, to guide us to our haven. And that night when we had made harbor on a tow-head in midstream, the little light still shone across at us, as though it had been set there to give us Christmas cheer.

We needed comfort and security that night. In the south cotton money comes in at Christmas, and the Negroes have then the fireworks

which in the north are sent up on the Fourth of July. We discovered, when it was too late to move, that there was a camp of them, all drunk, on the lower end of the towhead.

They were sending up fireworks while they sent down firewater. We hid our boat carefully and I watched most of the night, but no one came to disturb us. Another day brought us to Lake Providence, and from there we traveled "double team" with Billy Mason, gambler.

It would be difficult to say which is the more vivid to-day, our memory of Lake Providence or our recollection of Billy Mason. The town was a quaint, quiet southern town, set on the shore of one of those moon-shaped lakes which are bits of old river channel. The lake was bordered by venerable cypress, and had we wished we could have moved our boat over to it, by a heavy haul overland, and have floated from it down the quiet reaches of the bayou Tensas to the Red river. We spent a week there and often in the evening walked out and enjoyed the sight of that curving, cypress-bordered lake.

But Billy Mason was no whit less picturesque. He was "on the bank," as the phrase

goes, when we came, living with his wife, his dog, his cat and his boy, in a brand new tent. They had been caught here in the gale we weathered at Greenville, thrown broadside on a mud shore and swamped. They had rescued their furniture and were waiting for the boat to dry out. Billy was a gambler, by profession and by instinct. I remember walking with him later up Washington street, in Vicksburg. We came upon a gambler running a shell game by the sidewalk. Billy hailed him in an undertone:

"How about this town?" he asked.

"Who are you?" demanded the other.

"A grifter — like yourself."

"What's your lay?"

"Gallery, canes and wheel. Can I fix it?"

"Sure — look at me! Fix anything here! But there's two gangs, county and city. Got to fix police and sheriff too."

"Not for mine," said Billy, as he walked away. "No county seat jobs for me when there's small town pickings in cotton time. This double game is too costly, and besides each side is jealous for fear you paid the other more than you did him."

Four o'clock tea in Shantyboat Town

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In Lake Providence Billy had his shooting gallery set up in a store on the main street, and spent his days there. He was looking for someone to come along — as we had done — with whom he could double for the trip through the "bad" region. He was a "character," a novelist's man. He was long, thin, saturnine. He was reputed a dead shot, and a quick man to anger. If he had a tender side, he kept it for display to the little puppy and kitten which he carried about, one head out of each side pocket, and which, whenever he stopped, he set down to play at his feet. Most shanty-boaters require their wives to work the sweeps which propel the boat to and from shore. Billy had a half-witted son; and used him instead. He had a long and narrow boat with a sternwheel turned by a handcrank and to this the boy furnished the motive power.

Mrs. Mason, Billy's latest wife, was a German woman, apparently capable and sensible. While Billy ran his gambling works up town, she was busy cleaning out the cabin and drying her possessions.

We spent a week there, in which I wrote the

report I had contracted for in Chicago and mailed it back. Then on a bright, still morning, we drifted away in company with Mason, traveling in team for greater safety. Mrs. Mason, returned to her home, had baked the day before and presented us with a loaf of delicious bread, a welcome addition to our scanty stock. The two boats floated along within a mile of each other for day after day, through Milliken's bend and down past Duckport landing, and so at last a week or ten days after leaving Lake Providence, we passed the old mouth of the Yazoo and rounding a long bend came to Kleinston where we entered the canal which leads to Centennial lake and the city front of Vicksburg.

Thus ended the second phase of our journey, in which travail and striving, the hard effort of meeting and passing through the almost desperate situations in which we more than once found ourselves, the ultimate triumph over them, created a new capacity in us and opened for us a new path leading to a broader philosophy.

CHAPTER XII

VICKSBURG AND HARD LABOR

THREE is the mysterious number which seems to have associated itself with our journey. There were three geographical stages — the Old Canal, the Illinois, and the Mississippi. There were three seasons — the delightful autumn, the hurrying, stormy winter, and the wonderful spring. And there were three epochs — Before Vicksburg, Vicksburg, and After Vicksburg. In the days of the first period we were earning our precarious livelihood by fits and starts, rich to-day and poor to-morrow, but always managing to keep a sufficiency on hand — till we arrived at Vicksburg, free of the worry of our main task (ended at Lake Providence), and also free of groceries both green and staple. We were tired of fried corn and mush. After Vicksburg we were plutocrats, with money in the bank and with an ample supply for all contingencies stored away

in our purse with us. We could abandon the boat at any town and go home in style on train or steamer. But in Vicksburg, where we made the transition from *ante* to *post* we toiled for our daily bread with an earnestness that was amusing in spite of its reality.

That first morning when we arrived I hastened to the postoffice with Mason, in confident expectation of finding three hundred dollars awaiting us. The best-laid plans went agley again. Not so much as a scrawl of paper was there for us. I fingered my last quarter lonesomely in my pocket and wondered what would happen next. Mason, who admired what he called my "gift of gab," sizing up the situation, saw an opportunity to reopen an offer he had made before, and besought me to "double" with him in business as well as in friendly travel, and to help manage his "square" games on even shares. "We could skin the hide off any nigger in the valley," he said. It was a tempting offer, considering the state of our finances, but I had not come to the point where a position as assistant faker appealed to me as being more gentlemanly than

the honest toil of a mechanic. Here on every side were as good men as I, working with their hands; and while my hands were whole and my muscles as strong as months at the sweeps could make them I had no doubt of my ability to do the same.

The canal which we had entered on our arrival was a new one being cut for the government by two huge dredges that were working less than a half mile from our mooring. A naphtha launch from South Haven, Michigan, was busy towing coal-flats to and fro, and the captain, an acquaintance of the Memphis eddy, told us that more help was needed. A little way up from the mooring of the *Easy Way* stood the plain board shanty which served for the temporary headquarters of this section of the Atlantic, Gulf and Pacific dredging company. A single inquiry gave me the information that Captain Nelson was the " boss " of the job. And to a big, gigantic, fair-haired Swede in the shanty I forthwith addressed myself.

" Captain Nelson? " I asked.

" Yes, — that 's me."

" I want work."

"What can you do?" — looking me over carefully.

"Anything an untrained man with muscles can do, I reckon. I 've muscles to spare."

"Yes, — I bet you can. Well, you go to work Monday morning at seven o' clock. Report at dredge Number 5, to Mr. Yorcke, the engineer, and tell him I sent you up as coal-passer. That 'll be fifty-one dollars a month — one dollar held out for doctor."

"By the way, Captain Nelson," said I, "I 'll need a little in the way of advance from time to time. Can I draw before the month? I have my family with me."

A young man in the background looked up at this and eyed me even more carefully than the larger Nelson had done.

"That 's all right," he said pleasantly, at last. "Will ten dollars fix you up for the present?"

"Excellently," said I.

He drew a pile of bills from a drawer and selected a ten, which he handed to me, after writing my name down on a time sheet and making the entry. Wherever he may be to-day,

there breathes no man to whom I am more sincerely grateful, than I am to that little captain of Number 5 — Joe Titzel, than whom no chief was ever better loved by a hard-working crew. With a fuller pocket and a lighter heart I went on to the *Easy Way* and told Janet our fortune. She rejoiced in it, heartily. What " coal-passer " might be we neither of us knew. That this would be hard work we did not doubt — but I did not doubt either that whatever any other man could do I could do, and, in a short time, as well as he. So we spent the afternoon and the next day in sight-seeing, making a trip to Centennial lake and the National Cemetery in the naphtha launch, and on Monday morning I took my tin dinnerpail in hand and fared away to the scene of my labors, while Janet, transformed into as cheery a workingman's wife as ever packed a lunch, waved me Godspeed from the forward deck and then hastened in opposite direction on a marketing tour.

Dear reader, did you ever shovel coal? Yes? Into a coal hod? Yes? Well, this was an entirely different thing. Did you ever go down into the cellar on a dark night and try to force

the blunt edge of the shovel into a tangled heap of bituminous lumps over the edge of the bunker? Yes? Well, this was worse than that. Imagine a mass of coal extending from the bulkhead of the firehold to the after end of the ship — perhaps twenty feet — and the full width of the hull, and up to the deck beams, except where it sloped down a little in front. Imagine facing that awful coal pile at seven in the morning, and having a heavy, business-like scoop thrust into your hand, and being told to begin shoveling that heap away and to keep shoveling till six o'clock that night, and if you get lunch at all to eat it in between shovelfuls.

Then imagine attacking that frowning pile, that Gibraltar of black diamonds, and trying to guide the great scoop in and out through the mazes of that tangle. Imagine yourself struggling for five minutes that seemed hours to get a shovelful, while a fireman looked scornfully on, and drawing it out to find one measly little piece on the steel blade.

Then conceive that when you were busy at that, and the fireman with no compassion for

your greenness kept calling violently "More coal, more coal, there, Coal-passer," — that then all of a sudden a burly gang of deck hands appeared against the skyline overhead, and shouted:

"Come on, now, send up them ashes. Lively, now. We can't wait all day." And then, when they found you had n't even raked them out of the pit, they stood over you and swore till the Chief came and swore too, and even the fireman cursed a little. You got a long-handled hoe that weighed a ton or more and went to work dragging out the ashes and found that they were all watersoaked and heavy. You hauled and pulled till they were brought from the farthest recesses and piled up on the iron floor in front of the five doors of the furnace, and then from nowhere in particular dropped a big iron bucket with sides unnecessarily high, and you had to shovel those ashes into it. Overhead the deck hands still cursed and cried for haste. The soggy ashes grew momentarily heavier. Your back, already worn and aching with the easier swing of the coal, refused to respond longer to your demand for an up and

down motion to lift these tons of débris into the maw of the pail. Up and down went the bucket till at last you threw in the last ton, and began to breathe freely, when from somewhere aloft came a loud and oath-assisted voice:

"Well, for —— sake, ain't you put no water in them pits? Do you want to burn up this boat, you —— lunkhead? Get the hose now and souse them ash-pits."

Imagine that you had got the hose, and were to the best of your ability sousing "them ash-pits" when from a different quarter another voice broke out:

"Here, you —— Coal-passer. Don't get any of that water on my grate bars, I don't want them breaking."

A moment later: "————! Have I got to wait all day for MORE COAL? MORE COAL, YOU!"

Ah, well, imagine all that if you can. But stop — there 's another side to it. Remember, while you 're imagining, that a rough and ready fireman, seeing your back stop swinging, pushed you aside with sudden kindness and attacked the ashpile, with:

"Here, old man, let me give you a lift."

Imagine that after a while you got down to the bottom of that coal pile, adjacent to the bulkhead, and could shovel along the floor. In a little while you grew so accustomed to shoveling that you cast aside the number three scoop that had seemed so enormous and took to a number seven, and then to the big number nine that had loomed threateningly in the offing when you first came aboard.

Imagine that at evening, when you were worn to a frazzle, the fireman showed you where to get a bucket of hot water and a cake of soap, and you stood on a running plank over the firehold and sousled yourself from head to foot till you felt refreshed and clean again. And then — but no, you can't imagine the "and then," for there is only one Janet. But try to imagine as well as you can that you stepped into a punt alongside, caught the sculling oar in one hand, and swiftly, with an old familiar twirl, went toward your house boat floating just astern. As you came toward it you whistled, — just softly, "whee-whoo," — and the back door flew open and out leaned the dearest head and

over the water came an answering "wheewhoo," and the head bobbed back inside; and a second later when you drew alongside and peeked in, the dearest woman in the world was just putting a platter of steak and a big dish of mashed potatoes and a pot of tea on the table, where the rest of the supper was already waiting it.

Who cares for a day's work? It 's a man's job. It 's what we all do. Who cares if he does shovel heaven knows how many tons of coal in an eleven-hour watch, and rake the ash-pits and clean fires two or three times, and do divers other tasks? Who cares — when there 's Janet to come home to at night, with such a welcome as the King of Fairyland could not command and his Queen, I 'll wager, could not give?

Such was our life at Vicksburg in those happy days of January and February, 1901. Six days I shoveled coal on the big dredge, and on the seventh — no — you read that in the Bible. I did not rest. Dredge companies know no commandment except "Thou shalt keep hustling," and their motto is "The wages

Some shanty-boat kids

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of fail is fire." On Sunday we cleaned up the dredge. The night man drew the fires at six o'clock, and then went to that diabolical invention called a "back connection chamber" which is just back of the fire-arch, and which was full of a week's accumulation of impalpable ash-dust, red-hot from the flames which had played over it six days without cessation. He opened a tiny manhole on the floor and thrust in the end of a hose and wet down the ashes inside. At seven I came on duty, and opening the manhole attacked the dust, which was dry again by this time and still hot, though not as hot as before. I thrust the shovel in and threw a little of the dust over the arch, scraped and shoveled and made a tiny opening, then down on my belly and crawled through the manhole into — well, I landed just where Dante must have been at one stage of his journey. I had left all hope behind without seeing the legend. It was hot. The dust rose in clouds and stifled me. It was dark save for the glimmer of my torch. And for an hour or so I shoveled that dust over the arch. I knelt and bowed my head, every now and then rais-

ing it and striking it against the hot pipes overhead in which was steam at one hundred and seventy-five pounds to the square inch. If the dust had not kept the place hot enough those hot pipes would.

When I had that done — or maybe it was before — I had the pleasant task of crawling into the furnace doors, over hot grate bars, and with a cold-chisel and a coal hammer going around the walls of the firebox and chiseling away a week's accumulation of clinker — clinker often red-hot. Then the ash-pits must be raked and the ashes shoveled to one side, and after that I had to get up steam on the donkey boiler and then we — the fireman and I —tackled the " combustion chamber " together. That was a place they never showed Dante. It is the thirty-third degree of hereafter. When one of the devils, long acclimated to the hottest there is, gets bad, they put him into the combustion chamber. It is back of and over the boiler, where the gases are supposed to be burned. It is at the foot of the big stack. One climbs through a tiny manhole, and standing on the hot steampipes or on a tile laid over

them, picks up one by one a lot of tiles laid between the pipes and lets the soot that has gathered in a week drop through to the back connection. The dry soot rises in the upward air current the moment it is disturbed. You have been careful to shut the dampers in the chimney and cut off what draft you can, at the cost of an awful heat, but still the air goes up. Your feet burn. You cannot even touch the pipes around you, except with leather gloves, and you handle the tiles with a trowel. That is too hot for any man. The fireman and the coal-passer used to take turns at it on our boat, each working five minutes or so at a time. One day my lantern exploded, it was so hot in there. After that we used a torch. When all our work was done the great centrifugal pump had to be put together — for all this while the engineers and deck hands had been cleaning it. Sometimes the "cutter" on the end of the suction had to be brought up and cleaned or overhauled. There were countless things to do. It was late afternoon before Sunday ended on the dredge — and not till as a last thing I had crawled through a fourteen-

inch porthole into the wood-bunkers and passed out a big pile of cord-sticks to start the fires again, and had started them and had passed out enough coal to keep them going till the night gang came on duty. Sunday was no day of rest with me in Vicksburg.

And yet I think it was the second week that was the hardest there, for on Sunday the gangs shifted and we became the night crew, going on at six Monday evening and working thirteen hours without let-up. At first Janet used to put up a lunch for me to take, and then I would start away with much misgiving. There were rough characters on the river, and this levee was the worst spot in Vicksburg. To leave her alone in our little cabin all night was hard. Nervous as she was she faced it bravely and bore the strain like a heroine. I used to see the light in her window from the deck of the dredge, and know that she sat at the table reading or writing, with a pistol by her side, till long after midnight. Then in the morning, when worn by the long toil, I would come whistling alongside and rap on the deck — well, there 's no use in telling. The world

was new and fresh every morning. Love was not a new story, but love itself was new, new as the pristine morn each day. It was worth working for. I used to turn in and try to sleep after breakfast while she cleaned the house and went away marketing, and then all day, when we should have been rambling or rollicking together, she must sit still as a mouse for fear of waking me. It was harder on her than on me. We had a little relief, however, after the first week, when I had better learned my work. I used to throw out a couple of tons of coal into the firehold, then climb into the punt and go home and visit with my wife till I heard the fireman's merry hail of "More coal, — MORE COAL, YOU Coal-passer." I had my suppers home at midnight, then.

We had some lessons in the cost of living there, and they concerned more things than the table supply. My high-priced shoes were not long proof against the hot ashes, the continual wetting of the floor in the firehold. I went up the hill, on the advice of the fireman, and bought a pair of "brogans" for one dollar and twenty-five cents. They

were crude, heavy, solid shoes, that hurt my feet till I got used to them. But there was no wear out to them. To go in them I bought several pair of socks at five cents a pair — undyed cotton. Whether it is the dye that makes costly stockings rotten, or whether there is some other trouble, I do not know; but I wore these five cent socks through many weeks of coal shoveling, and again for weeks on the river, and then for more weeks on an island in Maine, and then threw them away because I could not wear them in civilization. They were still, most of them, undarned. They were the original holeproof. And as for the brogans, after two months in Vicksburg and a month en route to New Orleans, they were still apparently unscarred and unworn, hard as iron and equally durable. So I gave them to the old darky who was watchman for us at New Orleans, despite Janet's protest that they would be too big for him.

"Coal-passer!" If I should hear the name shouted out to-day, I would reach for a shovel as instinctively as a bargee ducks at "low bridge." It was my only name, and after a

A view of the canal we dug

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while it became a family designation. The crew of the dredge had grown curious about us, and used daily to watch Janet as she climbed the hill from the boat toward town. When she came back from the postoffice and brought me mail she would come down toward the dredge-landing instead of toward the *Easy Way,* and in a minute I would hear a hail from deck:

"Here's Coal-passer's wife. Hey! Coal-passer! Your wife wants you."

Gone is the memory of the aching back. Faded into nothing is the heat of the combustion chamber and the back connection. Yorcke, the chief engineer, is no more than the memory of a man who told me in confidence how back in his home town of Charleston the Confederates captured Fort Sumter from the British by building a raft of palmetto logs that soaked up cannonballs like a sponge soaks up water. The hardships were evanescent things. The real — that struggling together, that growing assurance of each other's dependability, that knitting of man and wife as each showed greater capacity and willingness to do for the

other; the sense of having done a day's work for a day's pay, of having demonstrated that a worker with his wits could do a man's work with his muscles as well and not fail at it, and that a woman bred as Janet was could carry herself so bravely through those days of privation — those things are as fresh with us to-day as they were then. The two months, as we look back on them, stand for a wholly unique, and a wonderfully valuable experience that not for the world would we give up.

CHAPTER XIII

NEIGHBORS GOOD AND BAD IN SHANTY-BOAT TOWN

SHANTY-BOAT TOWN at Vicksburg was as complete a ward of the greater shanty community as one could find from "Oklahoma" to Algiers. In the new canal were some score or more of boats of all descriptions, from a tiny "band-box" shanty which had for a day moored beside us at Lake Providence, to the stately *Carrie Houston,* which was said to have a piano aboard and to have come from Cincinnati, or the *Robin Adair* of Wheeling, West Virginia, whose owners wanted five hundred dollars for the stripped hull when they would have completed their journey.

All these boats lay before a somewhat abrupt bank about four feet in height when we landed, though as the river fell it became higher. A big coal flat from the Ohio river bumped against the sterns of them save when the wind

blew it to the other shore. The naphtha launch *Vessie,* running in and out of the canal, kept them bobbing with her waves, and from their decks men and women hailed each other, waved signals, or stepped ashore for a gossip on the bank. On the bank itself was a not less heterogeneous assembly of stranded "shanties." To the north, where the dredges were working, lived a one-legged Negro ferryman who with his skiff carried whatever passengers would go to the upper side of West Pass or even to Delta, Louisiana. He lived in a dilapidated red shanty which some earlier flood had deposited high on the bank. Its windows were gone long ago, and its door was but a memory of former grandeur. But it served as a habitation and a certificate that the one-legged ferryman might be admitted to the community without question and free of taxes.

Not far from him in an even less respectable cabin, perched on puncheons a foot above the ground, lived a "nigger gal" and her chickens. These latter were not metaphorical but veritable, and hopped in and out of the door with as much freedom as new members came and went

in our community. At the head of the slope, on the firm ground beside the railroad, in a new, white tent with a board floor, lived the owners of the *Vessie,* a family from Michigan, working their way south for pleasure and stopping here for profit. Charlie Fletcher, who ran the boat, lived aboard of her, and soon became one of our firm friends. We had met him on the street in Memphis where he had accosted us to learn if our mail had been forwarded from Cairo. As it happened a letter with money in it had come that way.

"You left a forwarding notice," said he; "and as you went away the postmaster let it blow out of the window. I saw it, and picked it up and took it back again."

Not far from the tent camp was the fish dock, a stranded flatboat with a sheltering roof, and with the counters and scales of a regular store; but with none of the restrictions as to the disposal of garbage which would have worried a town fishmonger.

On the surface there was nothing out of the way hereabouts. Poverty was obvious, loose morals are common on the river, but the truth

that there was within a stone's throw a half-world community was for a time happily veiled. Many things had passed under Janet's eye up the river from which she had learned much; but she had only inferred, never seen actually bad conditions. On the Vicksburg levee she was suddenly confronted with vice. Characterless Negro women occupied little red shanty-boats which lay high and dry at the crest of the flood line some distance from us; but near at hand was a more pitiful example. In search of a washerwoman Janet went one day to a big, red shanty-boat close at hand, and found a girl and a miserable old hag fighting their way against the last extreme of poverty. The girl, not yet fifteen years old, was about to become a mother. The embittered old woman, a virago, was so emaciated it was horrible to behold her. To Janet she tersely told her daughter's story, the subject of it moving at first defiantly, then apathetically, about the cabin while she talked. Janet hastily arranged for the washing and hurried home, revolted, shamed, almost stunned by the frankness of the tale. For days she suffered over the cruelty and misery she had

fairly glimpsed. Our washing, as did that of all the more prosperous levee folks, went to that wretched cabin the remaining weeks of our stay. Thus we eased our consciences of an unargued sense of obligation to the poor victims of conditions for which Society rather than themselves was responsible.

At the very mouth of the canal were the Davises, from Montrose, Iowa, the same who had been sought but not found by the young man of the box nets and the White river. They had been among those brought to shore at Arcadia to assist in the lynching, and gave us a detailed description of the whole crime and its sudden avenging. They lived in an old house boat, double-hulled, originally a floating home for a naphtha launch, which they had floored over between the hulls and converted into a cabin boat. One or two of the family were sick at Vicksburg and went to the hospital. The boys worked for the dredging company in the shore gang.

Farther in, immediately adjoining the *Easy Way,* was a tiny, white boat, the picture of neatness, called the *Snowball of Paducah.*

This snowball looked like the home of contentment and comfortable prosperity — as river property goes. In the doorway as we first landed stood a neat-appearing young woman of perhaps twenty-six, with flaxen hair and pink-and-white cheeks and blue eyes. She had an innocent expression about her, and a neatness that bespoke the contented bride — which expression was later belied by blackened eyes and tears and a change of partners. Billy, her "husband" as we at first supposed, was less attractive — a low-browed, taciturn, ignorant young man. May — so the Snowball Queen was called — paid us a visit on our arrival. Janet was cleaning house in my absence, when, the doors and windows all being open, she was surprised by the tilting of the boat as someone stepped unbidden to our deck. This in itself was a breach of river etiquette sufficiently startling, but, on turning, my wife was even more surprised to see May, bareheaded and smiling, standing in the doorway.

"Haowdy," said the visitor, cheerily, and in a somewhat tentative manner, as if asking how she was to be received.

"Why, — good morning," said Janet, cheerfully.

That was invitation enough, and May began a critical inspection of all we owned. It was at this moment that my wife discovered that May was chewing tobacco — not merely snuff-dipping, but masticating real plug. Never having seen a woman engaged in this delightful occupation, Janet was startled — perhaps no less by the contrast between May's neat appearance and her filthy practice. Her jaw dropped and she stared impolitely but effectually.

"Oh!" said May, nonchalantly, perceiving the effect she had created and rightly guessing its cause. "Y' all don't chew tobacco. Does yuh?"

"No," said Janet, quite truthfully; "I do not."

"Why, up no'th," said May, with the air of one carelessly delivering a home shot, "up no'th all the ladies chews tobacco."

Thus having settled all Janet's pretensions to gentility in Shanty-boat Town or elsewhere, May went home. My wife sat on the edge of

the bed and laughed till the tears came, and was still in a state between merriment and indignation when I arrived to hear the tale. Others came and went, but May and Billy never again darkened our doors. We were settled for them. With studied rudeness they made our deck a sidewalk in their visits to the Goodward boat on the other side of us. But their only intercourse with us at Vicksburg was a surly nod of greeting from their own doorway.

Yet there I err. I did have a moment's war with Billy on the second day, when he heard I had engaged as coal-passer. Billy had intended to take that job himself. When he had been a week in camp he had in fact applied and had been engaged, but had told Captain Nelson he would n't be ready to go to work for a few days yet. He wanted to get rested up after his trip down the river. This resting process had now lasted ten days or more, during which he had loafed before his boat with repeated assurances that pretty soon he would "taken to wo'k." Now as he saw the job vanish before his eyes he believed that not an-

other one was to be had of the company. As a matter of fact there was scarcely a sizeable village on the whole lower river in that day, where the willing man could not find work at good wages. But Billy was as angry outwardly as he was relieved inwardly, and vented his wrath in a wordy attack on me. It comes back dimly to me now, as the only unkindly word spoken to us by river folks, except that of a drunken man at Morris, which after all was on the canal.

In this dispute with Billy it was that I first gained the moral support and then the intimate acquaintance of Old Man Good'a'd, than whom I know no more loyal friend on the whole great waterway. He stood on the deck of his boat as Billy and I argued — a tall, square-shouldered, powerfully built, but ineffably lazy, long-bearded, brown-eyed patriarch. When Billy had gone and I stood alone, the victor of the field, he addressed me in words of encouragement.

"That 's jes' right, Jawn," he called, evidently having heard my name through our open windows. "That 's jes' right! Billy, he 's a

good boy, but he ain't got no mo' call on that job 'n what I have. He jes' been a-lazyin' heah an' nothin' I c'd say 'ld git him to wo'kin. You got a mighty good job an' I 'm glad of hit. If I was a strong man I 'd taken to wo'k myself. I wisht they was anotheh job jes' like youhs, an' if I was a bit pearter, dinged ef I would n't go afteh hit."

In all of our acquaintance with Good'a'd I never secured a more intimate glimpse into his nature than through that first short speech — unless it was from a story Billy Householder told me of him one day when, having broken a steamboat journey down the river, I lounged with him in the autumn of 1903 under the browning hickories on the shore of the bayou St. John.

"What 's the latest from Goodward?" I had asked him; and with a chuckle Billy, who considers himself the most accomplished junk remover on the river, replied:

"Good'a'd? Say, let me tell you what he done. Last time I was in Vicksbu'g he was there, and dinged if the old rip did n't take and steal a whole sack of brasses off'n the rail-

road. And then he brung 'em to his boat, and he an' the old woman and Buddy held prayers over 'em. Great character Good'a'd is!"

We had his story from his own lips. He had been a preacher down in Texas, but growing lazy and having a good chance to trade off his congregation, he had abandoned such irksome tasks as the pulpit furnished him and had taken to the river. With his family now consisting of a wife and two sons, he drifted slowly downstream, stopping weeks or even months at places that pleased him, trading boats, logging in eddies, stealing junk or whatever offered, holding occasional church services or prayer meetings on board and taking up an inevitable collection; and, when he had gone as far down as Natchez, hiring a tow from some upbound coal boat and going back to Memphis.

He was reputed a deep thinker, and evidently deserved the reputation, as we soon had cause to know. We heard him hail the Adventist preacher who had come to the levee for missionary work.

"Howdy, Pahson," he called.

"Howdy, Brotheh Good'a'd."

"Pahson," — this thoughtfully, — "I ben a-studyin.' Does y'all reckon, Pahson, that they have ships in Heaven?"

The parson was a cautious man, not to be too easily drawn into a trap by an adversary.

"Well, now, Brotheh Good'a'd," he said slowly, "that aih is right smaht of a question to answeh off-hand like. I 'd need to study oveh it quite a bit. But — you know they 've got aih-ships even heah?"

"Yasseh," said Brother Good'a'd, as if struck by this apt suggestion, — "Yasseh, Pahson, I reckon that 's so. Hit 's sholey so. But Pahson, don't you-all reckon that if they do have ships to Heaven, they 'll jes' shove us riveh folks oveh onto Shanty-boat side?"

Vicksburg without Good'a'd would be no Vicksburg at all to us. We visited it later and it was but a hollow mockery of the place we knew. And Good'a'd would not be Good'a'd to us now, for Sambuno would be grown up.

Sambuno — known more commonly by his chosen nickname of "Iody" — was a handsome, sunny, yellow-haired boy of two years.

He was such a healthy, happy, strong-legged, independent youngster as many a rich man would give a fortune to possess. He was Good-'a'd in miniature without the laziness or the dishonesty.

" Sambuno," I remarked reflectively one day in the old man's hearing, " where did you get that name, Brother Goodward? It 's an odd one."

" Jawn, I 'll jes' tell you wheh we got that name," he said, promptly. " Expectin' of that aih chile, we was a-layin' at Buny Visty island, the old woman and Buddy and me, and we taken a liking to that name. We made up ouh minds that ef hit come a gal chile we 'd gi'n huh that name, Buny Visty Good'a'd, but ef hit come a boy we 'd name him atteh me, Samuel.

" Wal, seh, when hit come a welcome and a male chile, somehow we jes' could n't gi'n up that name, Buny, so we hitched them two togetheh and called him Sambuno. And it 's a high-soundin' name that we ain't neveh had no cause to regret."

By this time the old chap was waxing con-

fidential and being on a favorite theme he continued: "That aih chile Sambuno, John, is prob'ly the only puffick and cawmplete babby on the Mississippi riveh. Yasseh! When he was a yeah ol' we taken him to a babby show at Orleens, and they was a thousand babbies went up against him, and not one of 'em could tech him. No, seh, not one. When hit come to g'in' out the prizes them doctahs gi'n him eve'y one they was — yasseh, eve'y one. They said he had n't got no waht, mole, mahk, scratch noh pimple on his body, — and that 's what them doctahs says constitutes a puffick and cawmplete babby."

Sambuno was certainly "cawmplete" as far as we could see. He was the delight of Shanty-boat Town and wandered from one end of it to the other ruling all who dwelt in it with a rod of iron. We enjoyed him greatly — but his father more. One day, as my wife started to market with a basket in hand, Good'a'd eyed her approvingly from his deck.

"That 's right, Mis' Mathews," he called; "I read in the Scriptu'es, 'when you ah in Vicksbu'g do 's the Romans do.'"

Another of our neighbors, and a famous river dweller, who came into Vicksburg while we were there was "Espanto, the Mexican Indian medicine man." "Espanto" was a universal genius who had discovered the American fondness for humbug and was making full use of it. He was traveling in a roomy, substantial house boat decorated with signs announcing his calling and the mysterious potency of his wares. We saw him standing on his gang plank one morning, and having been told much about him did not hesitate to "take him in." He was rather a small man, very dark of face, — we were told by one of his former assistants that he dyed his face and hands, — with long hair braided in a queue and worn down his back. He also wore an old-fashioned frock coat, the flaring skirts of which flapped in the wind. He wore no hat. Later, on the Yazoo, when we wanted to take a snapshot of him, he unbraided his hair and let it flow over his shoulders, as he wore it when on "medicine" duty. He was from Michigan and his real name was Billy.

For several years "Espanto" had been traveling up and down the river in his boat

selling humbug remedies to blacks and whites, working all sorts of quack medical dodges, and making a comfortable fortune out of it. Clarence, our neighbor at Memphis, had been his assistant one year and told us much about him.

"His wife is the real brains of the firm," said Clarence, "though they are both smart enough. She runs the medicine part. She 's a mighty nice, motherly old lady, and was very good to me. Billy puts up the front, fixing his hair and his complexion to look like a 'Mexican Indian' — as he styles himself. He is a dead shot, and has some fine pistols and guns. The niggers are afraid of him as he is said to be a 'voodoo,' but there is no one else they will doctor with if they can get him. They come miles to get his charms and remedies.

"At Lake Providence, one cotton time, he took in over a thousand dollars in ten days, and then the other doctors got the marshal after him for practicing without a license. They took him up to the jail and he gave one hundred dollars cash bail to come for trial the next day. Then he went back to the boat and went to work again. He made that one hundred

Espanto

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dollars up in no time. The marshal came down a second time but Espanto told him the waterfront was United States property and he would n't be arrested. He stood guard with a rifle, so no one dared come over the levee, and his wife took in the lines. They dropped just below the town limits. That advertised them so that they took in a good many hundred more in the next week. Billy did n't go back for trial and the judge was mad that he had n't put the bail at five hundred dollars. Billy would have given that just as easy as one hundred."

Everyone on the river knew Espanto, and nearly everyone liked him — that is of the river folks. He was rather taciturn, but hospitable and willing to help those who needed it. But the folks on shore either hated or feared him. An evidence of his prosperity was his offer to the *Vessie's* owners of one hundred dollars to tow him a little way up the Yazoo. He finally engaged a boat at a higher figure. He expected to get that all back and much more in the few weeks he would spend up the river of the Delta.

I met Espanto in St. Louis again in 1903.

He had sold his boat and was visiting friends at "Oklahoma," the St. Louis Shanty-boat Town.

"No more river for me," he said. "I have bought a good farm out in this State and my wife and I will live in peace the rest of our lives."

"Too many places he can't go back to," said another river man.

The canal at Vicksburg, on which we were all living, was being dug to make a harbor for the city on the Walnut Hills. In war time Pemberton occupied the bluffs; Grant tried in vain to send the river across a neck of land back of De Soto, Louisiana, to cut off the city. After the war, however, the river took a turn to go that way itself, and about a mile from the "Grant Canal" made a cut-off, leaving Vicksburg inland some two miles, on the shore of a beautiful crescent lake — Centennial lake — which soon became landlocked except at extreme high water.

Vicksburg was too dead to move down to the new levee at Kleinston. It was completely prostrate for a long time after the war. It waited

impatiently for the federal government to bring its river back to it. Many attempts were made to do this, most of them by damming up "West Pass" — the head of Centennial lake — and dredging a canal at the foot along the old water-front. Whenever the river rose, however, it made an eddy up into this canal and filled it with silt, so that after each high water it had to be dredged again at great expense. At last it was decided to bring the Yazoo down past Vicksburg. That charming little stream flowing along the front of the line of hills — the same line on which are Hickman and Columbus and Memphis, Fort Adams, Baton Rouge and Port Hudson — emptied into an "old river" similar to Centennial lake and separated from it only by a narrow strip of bottomland. Accordingly two huge suction dredges attacked the old channel at Kleinston; and a big dipper dredge cut out the strip between the lakes. The Yazoo soon found a new and shorter course open to it, to the Mississippi. Naturally it chose this mode of exit, and Vicksburg stood on its hills and cheered as the sluggish current found its way past the old levee.

Comedy smiled on us through tears in Vicksburg. Away back at New Madrid I had sent two stories to *McClure's* magazine. At Arkansas City I had received an acceptance. And now in the hour of need, I received my payment. It came on a rainy day — such a rainy day as the Mississippi had not seen since the weather bureau was established. In thirty-six hours nearly eleven inches of rain fell, and most of it fell on a single day. It came down the face of the great bluffs in an awful torrent, and swept into the canal a deluge of mud to fill the cut the dredges had made. It soaked and battered the bank till the earth settled of its own weight. And it pounded out the last remnant of paint in the roof of the *Easy Way* — still unpainted since its soaking at New Madrid — and came through in an increasing number of places. Bit by bit my lady retreated, until at night, when I came slumping home from work through a sea of mud and slopped down the soggy bank to the deck, I found her seated in the only dry spot in the boat, — the middle of the bed, — which remained dry as long as she protected it. There she sat, sur-

rounded by watersoaked furniture and bedding, with tears in her eyes, but tears of joy. She was waving a letter and a check.

We laugh now when we think of that check. It represented the total payment for two stories found worthy of being printed in *McClure's* magazine, — the size of payment offered to young and inexperienced writers who do not know what they should be paid.

It was exactly thirty-five dollars for two; seventeen dollars and fifty cents each. Accompanied by a personal letter from the editor-in-chief! Cheaper than newspaper space! Ah, well — others have been stung the same way; and in this case it stood us in well, for it came in the hour of need. It meant comfort in a hotel till the boat dried out, and plenty of paint for the roof. Into a grip quickly went a change of clothes, — hitherto kept dry in a trunk, — and out into the storm went we, without umbrella or delay. The nearest cab or carriage was a mile away. There was no available telephone in an equal distance. The mud precluded bringing one near the boat, and there was no use trying to get one any-

way. The hotel was two miles off, but we started thither on foot. The roads were impassible, so we took the easier grade up the railway tracks, walking between the rails in a flood which swept the top of the steel. Half an hour later, drenched to the skin, muddy and bedraggled, but very happy, we dripped our way across the rotunda of the big hotel, demanded a good room, a hot bath, an open fire, and a hot toddy. We were lords of the land now, and as long as the check lasted we remained so. It must have amused the curious Vicksburglars — I know it did the dredge crew — to see the coal-passer coming to work every day from one of the chief hotels of the city. But there was no use taking my wife back to the *Easy Way* till the cabin was dry and the roof painted. Later, when we had saved up considerable from my wages, money suddenly poured in from all directions, and being thus in ample funds I resigned my task, and to the amazement of all our neighbors we became again people of leisure.

We made from Vicksburg a very pleasurable side trip up the Yazoo river. It is two hun-

dred and forty miles up that stream to Greenwood. Several little steamers were in the trade, and to the agent of the line we applied for round-trip prices. He suggested sixteen dollars each, including meals and berth, for the week's trip. We thought we could do better, and went to Captain Richardson of the *Rees Pritchard*. He looked us over, said "bride and groom" to himself, and made a bid for our patronage.

"You mean to go right up and back?" he asked.

"Yes."

"All right at once? You don't want to stop theh?"

"No."

"Well — Jake, look up them rate sheets. I do' know 's I eveh made a rate jes' that way. Let me see — suppose we say fifteen dollahs."

"Apiece?"

"Oh, no, seh. Foh the two of you."

We paid it on the spot, went home and engaged a Negro to keep watch over our boat from his post on a neighboring coal flat, requested Charlie Fletcher, of the *Vessie,* to keep

an eye on the darky, packed our grips and boarded the steamer.

Captain Richardson was a southern gentleman of the truest sort, — soft of voice, quick of temper, courtly in manner and in action. To be sure he nearly broke his hand hammering the head of a Negro who had laughed at him, and had thus made him so mad he could not wait to get a club. But also he saved the life of a drowning rat and supported it till it was strong enough to steal for itself.

We taught the captain to play parchesi, and spent happy days in the lofty pilot house at the game while he regaled us with stories of the river. We came back through Tchula lake, where trees brushed the cabin windows on both sides at the same time, and where a snowstorm, a most unusual thing there, beset us and drove us to the bank. When at last we came again into the Mississippi and in sight of the Walnut Hills, we said farewell to the kindly captain with regret.

" I 'm mighty sorry to see y' all go," he said. " I do' know when I 've enjoyed a trip so. Come on right back up with us — you-all ain't in any

hurry. Come up and back again and it won't cost you a cent. I would n't have charged you this time if I 'd knowed what fun we would have."

But the season was growing late and we were in something of a hurry after all. So we said good-bye at the levee and began preparations for quitting our two-months' mooring.

As we completed them it was with real satisfaction that we looked back on this season of hard labor, realizing that through it and with it we had received the accolade which entitled us to sit at the Round Table of Philosophical Vagabonds.

CHAPTER XIV

OUR JOURNEY'S END

It was on the morning of the first of March that we left Vicksburg — a soft, balmy day without a suggestion of a breeze. The glassy surface of the river was only broken here and there by eddies. The strong current swept us swiftly away from Kleinston while a score of our old shanty-boat neighbors waved us farewell.

Brother Good'a'd stood on his landing stage as I took the lines, and mildly censured me for leaving so good a job as I had held.

"You-all won't get a two-dollah job everywheh you go, Jawn," he said. "Two dollahs is right smaht pay foh a young fellow nowadays. You git off heah down the riveh somewheh and you 'll wish mighty you was back passin' coal again."

"Why don't you take the job?" I asked.

"They 're looking for someone — three chaps have tried it since I quit."

"Yasseh," said Brother Good'a'd, smiling. "Yasseh, Jawn, that 's sholey so. And I reckon I would taken it, but I ain't jes' peart the las' few days and I feel like I got to res' a little longer."

He stood foremost among our neighbors as we drew out from shore, sending after us his benediction.

"I won't say good-bye, Jawn," he called after us. "I 'm a-comin' down soon myself. Likely I 'll ovehtake you-all befo' you get to Natchez."

"Why not come now?" I asked, knowing that his present boat was a harbor craft, unsafe for travel.

"Well, seh, I 'll tell you why. Yestiddy, Buddy he taken to wo'k. I reckon now we 'll stay heah till Buddy git ti'd of wo'kin'. Maybe to-morrow, maybe next day, we come off down riveh."

We drifted out of the canal and past Kleinston while the hands waved and the farewells rang out, and then, as Vicksburg gradually faded away astern, settled down to our almost

forgotten routine of travel. We were a little timid about drifting now. We felt some of that wonder and fear which Clarence had spoken of at Memphis. We understood the river better. We knew more of its might. We were a little in awe of it. Yet once we were well away, and drifting gently on its placid surface, my wife climbed again to the roof, where I had placed a steamer chair for her, and read aloud or talked, while I sat in a straight chair on deck, my sweeps held lightly in my hands, and from time to time leaned forward to push on them, to check some shoreward impulse of the boat.

It was a real spring day. Red birds and mocking-birds were singing in the woods, and their song came clearly to us over the still water. Flowers were blooming, and the scent of growing things was sweet to us. In the fields and on the hills, beside the river, men and mules were at work putting in the cotton. This was a cotton country altogether. In Illinois it had been the yellow corn that had spelled health and wealth, work and life to the people. Here it was the fleecy white staple.

The land was alive with it — lived on it. We had first come upon it at Island Number Ten. At Memphis we were surrounded by it. But here, at the foot of the Yazoo, we were able to see and hear of nothing else. In Vicksburg cotton lay in immense yards, awaiting compress and shipment. Oil mills devoured boat and trainloads of seed. Darkies drove mules, pell-mell, around the city, whisking bales from this yard to that, from landing to warehouse, from bale-yard to compress. Fleece clung to trees and fences. After a walk bits of it adorned our clothing. And of all cotton this was the finest, for while middling was quoted in New York at ten or eleven cents, this Yazoo crop was selling in Vicksburg for more than twenty cents a pound.

We had visited gins and balehouses, compresses and mills at various points. Now we watched the new crop going in, the countryside astir with its spring liveliness, and felt the same magic in the name of cotton that we had in that of corn along the Old Canal.

Yet not all the world was working. Came from a towhead and fell in beside us another

house boat, drifting. A gentle wind had risen from the Mississippi bank, and I pushed more frequently at my sweeps to keep the *Easy Way* in the current. On this other boat a stalwart river man, following the custom of his kind, lounged at ease upon the roof, smoking a pipe and taking life very comfortably, while his other half, well trained and obedient, toiled back and forth at the inboard end of a heavy ash sweep. The upsetting of tradition on our boat filled them with wonder. The man took his pipe from his teeth and pointed at me.

"Hi, there, Matey," he shouted across the intervening flood. "Why don't you make your old woman work them sweeps?"

It was a friendly question, and no doubt contained a good suggestion. But I never carried it out.

March winds on the lower river are traditionally hard. They blew every day in incessant gales for a week, while we struggled through the snaggy intricacies of Hard Times bend — a week of brilliant moonlight nights, during which we steadfastly refused to break our rule against night traveling.

Those were hard and tiresome days in Hard Times bend. Never was a place more justly named. One Sunday morning we landed early where our chart called for Ship Bayou landing, and pail in hand, set out to find a plantation and buy some milk and eggs. There was a big cypress forest close at hand, and where we had landed an old field grown with grass and marked here and there with those peculiar old field-cypresses with immense trunks and very small tops, characteristic of such a reclaimed piece of ground. This tract was half a mile wide and extended back as far as we could see, and in it and through the woods cattle were grazing. We were sure a habitation must be near. We walked three or four miles back, and came to nothing but diminishing cattle trails, the swamp and a lake. We found not a sign of people.

Wearily we retraced our steps. The wind was sweeping with tremendous force across the river, and the boat pitched and tossed. The whistling in the crevices worked on our nerves. We escaped but one thing, — the dust cloud. The opposite sandbar yielded to the storm a

burden of light dust which swept clear across the mile-wide river and back on the land, but fortunately we were below the range of it.

Another day we had worked down to Hard Times landing, and found a collection of dissatisfied darkies laboring for a Jewish family, who had been using the whip to make them work. They were getting ready to move away, they told us, as we were buying pullets of them.

"Where is old Ship Bayou landing?" we asked.

"Why, Marsah, that done wash in the river, houses and all, ten years ago. They ain't nobody up there now but them wild cattle that bred from the old plantation stock. Must be thousands of 'em that don't belong to nobody."

That was why we could not find Ship Bayou landing. The river had swallowed it. We lay two or three days longer at this landing, working at stories, fidgeting through tiresome days of wind and waves, and then, having stayed too long on a falling river, I had to wade in with my axe and cut away an underwater snag to get the boat free.

In despair we cut out and ran by moonlight, and got caught in a storm below Grand Gulf. But we landed without a great deal of trouble. The wind used to rise about ten in the morning, lapse at noon, come again at two o'clock and blow till after four. It was very regular in its hours, and we ran with some facility while it was slack. But we were for three days windbound at Shamrock store and then driven hard aground on a bar at Greene's bayou in Giles' bend, where we stayed five days waiting for a rise — which we knew from upriver bulletins was coming — to set us free.

That was not a bad delay. We were but five miles overland from Natchez, so we chartered a "nigger rig," — a buggy with no two wheels alike and none of them painted; a flea-bitten horse of no particular kind; no back to the buggy seat and no top to the vehicle. It rattled and sighed and slumped away, but with it the horse climbed a gorgeous sunken road through gullies and ravines, through forests of yellow pine and thickets of dogwood and redbud — up to the top of the bluff on which Natchez is, and from which we had a broad

outlook over the great horseshoe of Marengo bend. We created a sensation in Natchez, riding about the principal residence streets of the ancient capital in this old rig, dressed in our honeymoon clothes, reading aloud a great bunch of letters, admiring the camelias, now in full bloom, and the broad-spreading live oaks and deep-green magnolias which make the city so attractive. We capped it all by registering the horse at the hotel and setting him up to his first dinner of oats — for which he skipped all the way home as if he had been rejuvenated.

Later we floated by the town — past the great bluff and the tiny settlement at its foot, once so wicked, now so commonplace. A couple of days brought us to Fort Adams, and the " Line of 31," a century ago the southern boundary of the United States. This was the scene of Wilkinson's treason, and we studied the land with much interest. Another day we drifted past the mouth of the Red river, as we ate breakfast, and on our right saw the first river-side church since we had left Cairo.

We were on the " coast " now, — the upper, the " German " coast. On both sides there was

A view of Natchez and Vidalia

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no longer forest, but green batture, fronting a green-clad levee; and over the tops of that the roofs of cottages peeping. Each side was but a long village street, houses fronting the levee, and the fields sweeping away back of them to the swamps. On the right all this land drained away from the Mississippi to the Gulf, as it did also on the left after we passed bayou Manchac. We were in a busy land down there. Steamers passed us frequently, in the prosperous Red river trade, carrying cotton and seed, sugar, rice, syrup, stave bolts and all the rich products of the Red and Washita.

The river was narrow approaching its end. It was not more than a third of a mile, — a sixth as wide as it had been at Plum point. But it was very deep, — over one hundred feet. There were no bars, no snags, no obstructions of any sort. For three hundred miles ahead of us stretched this deep canal, with ample room and depth for the largest ships in the world to turn and to manœuvre. It was a populous stream. Every hour of the day, as we lounged on deck, idly enjoying the glorious spring weather, voices of children calling across

the river came to us from both sides; the sounds of men working, the sounds of barnyard animals. It was a homely land, with a flavor of quaintness and old-worldliness. We used to sit on our roof those days with our chart open and check off the names of the plantations as we passed them. Sometimes there were immense mansions, some of them very costly, — the grand mansions of the sugar lands. Sometimes there were mere shells of former wooden palaces, sheltered by deep groves of cedar and live oak. These oaks and the thickets which bordered the river at the projecting points were hung with long Spanish moss, so that in some reaches there was not a single definite line to be seen, only waving, indefinable mystery.

Yet we were not to have such lovely weather all the way. We came one night in sight of the "Scott-esque" turrets of the ancient capitol at Baton Rouge, and after a day in town passed down the river to find shelter from a threatening storm. We found no harbor, but moored to a steep bank, as high as our roof, with the water one hundred feet deep directly

back of us. In the middle of the night a cyclone or a hurricane struck us, coming across the river. It cut a wide swath through a belt of trees, tore down some houses, and ripping the *Easy Way* from her mooring, sent her broadside against the bank, plunging and pounding as if she would go to pieces any minute. For three hours we pounded there, while the crests of the waves went over our roof and the waves themselves crashed against our walls and windows. In that time we thanked our lucky stars for all the bolts, the braces, the keelsons, the strong iron bands that made our hull so heavy and strong. Not a drop of water entered it nor a seam started; yet when daylight came and the storm abated, there lay the wreck of a larger boat, a quarter of a mile away, from which the people had barely escaped; and on our line hung one broken board as a reminder that we had once had a skiff.

At no other time in the entire trip were we in such peril of our lives as we were during that hurricane. These terrible storms often wreck buildings, capsize and destroy river

steamboats, and cause heavy loss of life. That which caught us at Baton Rouge was memorable for its ferocity. To escape from our cabin was impossible, for the bank was steep, the waves washing over our deck, and the darkness impenetrable. While Janet clutched a lamp in one hand and steadied herself at a stanchion with the other, I dragged in from the deck some planks with which to barricade the windows if the crashing waves broke them —as it seemed certain they would. One of these planks, through my carelessness, nearly cost my wife her life.

As the storm abated, after three hours of terror, Janet threw herself on the bed on her back and closed her eyes. The sea was much less, and straightening up the cabin, I leaned two of the planks against the wall near the door. A little later, while I was at the rear of the boat, the steamer *St. James* came in close to us, and turning suddenly, sent the full discharge from her stern wheels at us, tilting the boat far over on its side, — farther than the hurricane waves had tilted it. One of the planks, overbalanced, fell upon Janet, a long

spike in the end missing her eye by less than half an inch, and scraping, without scratching, down the side of her face. The heavy walnut wood struck full on the bridge of her nose, injuring it so badly that the soreness did not leave it for a year, and reducing her, already worn by the storm, to a condition of collapse.

That nearly ended our trip where we lay. It seemed that day impossible to go further. We drove back to Baton Rouge in a plantation carriage for medical aid, and in the afternoon I found a quiet little creek big enough for the *Easy Way,* where we moored the boat and prepared for a period of rest. It took us a while to get over that storm. It had shocked and worn us badly. We found a little creek and moored in it, and lounged on the grassy batture, listening to a myriad of mocking-birds which inhabited a neighboring thicket, and which mimicked the red-wings which lived beyond the levee. Later we went our way again, one foggy morning, past Plaquemine, with the big locks half done at the mouth of its bayou, past Donaldsonville and the bayou La Fourche, past Bonnet Carre, where the river once opened

a way to Lake Pontchartrain; and at last, on a wonderful morning, when we had spent a night moored to a tree in an eddy, while floating débris knocked against our hull, in token of rising water, — one beautiful March morning, when we had cleared from our mooring at four o'clock, and had finished breakfast and mounted to the roof at five, — as we sat on the roof there came to us softly, but unmistakably, the smell of the sea and the salt marsh. How far away it was we did not know. It may have come from a bayou, or from Lake Pontchartrain. But from wherever it came, we both sensed in it at once a happy augury that our journey was nearing an end.

We sat on the roof that placid morning, hand in hand, watching the low, green banks glide by. Untended, without need of guidance, the *Easy Way* crossed from bend to bend, curved around turns, and kept herself to the swiftest water. We counted off the plantations as we had done before. We identified them all by our wonderful chart. There was a railroad station near at hand, and just as we had decided we were abreast of it a train came in

and stopped. We came down into a bend hung thick with mossy live oaks which idled without a tremor in the still air. Half-a-dozen men, cordeling an oyster lugger upstream, were on the shore beneath them. And a little later, swinging out from this Twelve Mile point with the channel, we suddenly saw, close at hand, over the trees ahead, the masts of a steamship; then another and another. We ran farther out until we could see down the reach we were entering to Nine Mile point, and there at its foot lay three big ocean steamships at an elevator.

After all, we had not realized we were so near the end. Though we had counted the miles, we had been so long afloat it seemed as though we could never really arrive. And yet we had arrived, or were in sight of the end; for those masts were at the wharves of New Orleans, and the *Easy Way*, coming steadily down toward them, was fifteen hundred miles from the river bank where she had been built beside that other elevator in Chicago.

There was a light wind blowing steadily upstream from Nine Mile point. It checked

the *Easy Way* and held her motionless. I got out the sweeps to row, but a big cypress log, buried deep in water, came along, and I caught hold of it. Thus for the last time Charles William Albright took charge of us. I sat on the edge of the deck bareheaded, barefooted, in my old working clothes; and my wife climbed to the roof and photographed me, as a reminder for later days, of how I looked on my wedding trip. The big log towed us slowly but faithfully down. I put a line on it at noontime, and we ate lunch on deck as we drifted. So, at one o'clock, we came to the end of the reach, and to the big eddy above the Southport elevator; and there, against the grassy bank, I moored the *Easy Way*.

It was an ideal camping place. There was a group of willows on the bank, in which song-birds — "pops," sparrows, mockers — sang all day. The batture and the levee were covered with soft grass and clover. The river was high and rising, so that our deck was level with the bank. There were houses back of the levee from which we could obtain supplies, and an old darky who had a raft nearby, for catch-

ing driftwood in the eddy, could be hired to act as watchman while we were away.

We left the *Easy Way* moored there and walked down the levee to Carrollton, a distance of perhaps two miles, and took a trolley car to New Orleans, and sent back word to our anxious friends that we had arrived. We went to the Café de la Louisiáne and tried their wonderful cooking. We explored the quaint old city, and in the evening went to the theatre, and walked home up the levee late at night. And when we had come back we were suddenly smitten with a strange, hollow, mournful sensation, at the knowledge that to-morrow there would be no travel; this was the end of the journey; this was the last mooring of the *Easy Way*.

We did not leave her so suddenly. Our plans for departure were slow in maturing, and finally developed into a trip in a four-masted schooner around to the Atlantic Coast. But three weeks elapsed before she sailed, and in that three weeks we remained aboard the *Easy Way*, enjoying to the full, while we could, the little home that had come so far with us.

We were indeed at the door of the sea. Great coal-tows from Pittsburg, two thousand miles inland, came down frequently and moored under the opposite point, sometimes with forty thousand tons in a tow. And on the same spot on which, on one day, I photographed a big steamboat starting upstream with her tow of empties, on the next I caught a four-masted steamship loaded with baled hay and mules for the British army, then operating against the Boers in South Africa. For Pittsburg and for Durban, — for the opposite ends of the world — for the sea and for the river, — the two boats set out from the same spot with equal simplicity and directness, the everyday business of the working world.

The three weeks that remained to us on the *Easy Way* went all too quickly. We sold our little boat for a song — but were not to give possession until our vessel sailed. Parting from it was a great grief. We thought of burning it, of setting it adrift, of all the romantic ways of disposing it; but they were none of them practical and so we sold it. Yet for that last three weeks we lived in happy

serenity there against the levee, visiting New Orleans every day or so, sight-seeing and shopping. By night the whispering eddies lulled us; we heard the call of the river as, perhaps, we shall hear it no more.

I know not what it is about the Mississippi that lures those who follow it. Its tongues are never still. It makes love to its followers with the lisping voices of its incessant swirls. Again it reaches out fierce waves and treacherous currents to destroy them. Yet the fascination is there; we felt it as Clarence felt it; as the woman in Bainbridge creek felt it; as those hosts of others moored along the bank all felt it. The river swamps them, destroys their boats, lures them like a siren to death; and still those who survive will follow it blindly to the end. So it has been and so it will be with us. Upon our minds rests an indelible impression of the vital power of the Great Water, and in everything that we have done since we moored the *Easy Way* to its last stakes, the call of the river has been strong upon us. The Mississippi has taken us for her own, and will not even now release us, so that no other

work enlists our hearts so strongly as the labor of developing the use and the power of the big river for the land in which it flows.

Yet in that lovely April when we lay against the Southport bank we believed we were but visitors upon it. We returned to the world at New Orleans. The *Easy Way* had become a suburban residence. And so at the last, when the expressman came at dawn for our freight and carried us down to the city and over to Algiers to take train to our schooner, it was our dwelling, not our boat, that we left.

We left her there under the willows, where we had moored her when we came in. The flood had risen over the batture, and we went in and out on a row of planks, laid over logs. The birds were riotous with song that morning. The levee clover was sweet and soft. Never looked a camp fairer to the eye than that; and as we went for the last time down behind the earthen rampart to the prosaic wagon road, we turned for a final look at the *Easy Way,* — the dear, cosy *Easy Way,* staunch and faithful shelter, — and Janet cried openly

Our first lugger — glimpsed on the upper coast

The *Easy Way* at the last mooring

and frankly at leaving her, and I wiped the tears from my own eyes unashamed.

Yet though we left the little boat where she lay, we carried away with us a rich heritage, — mutual adjustment, gained with primitive labor of the spirit beneath her roof, which united us as years of civilization could not have done; a greatly increased efficiency in all practical matters; a wider experience which we shared in common in the brotherhood of man; an unshakable reliance in each other born of hard experience in which no failure had marred the record; an endowment of clearer and wider vision into the meaning of democracy that opened the way for long work to come and to be carried in partnership; a heritage of faith, of sympathy, of determination, of philosophy.

Somewhere, afloat or sunk, is the *Easy Way* to-day, a shelter for shanty-boaters or for thieves, one knows not what. We may not see, and we may not know; and so memory brings up to us ever the picture of the little house resting there, cocky, with its rakish deck, alert, staunch, able, with its hull and its

roof tight and secure, — the *Easy Way* that had borne us across our country; the *Easy Way* of our honeymoon, with the multitude of experiences that make the honeymoon, with the poetry of the river trip, with the association of all those whom we met along the way, with our own happiness and fellowship and mutual understanding — it is this that we remember lying endlessly there, undying, surrounded by the songs of birds, the sweet odor of clover, the fresh green of the levee, and the mysterious luring whispers of the mighty river.